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ODD JOURNEYS

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IN AND OUT OF LONDON.

BY

JOHN HOLLINGSHEAD,
AUTHOR OF "UNDER BOW BELLS," "RUBBING THE GILT OFF," ETC.

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PREFACE.

I BELIEVE that according to the English law nothing is considered a nuisance which keeps moving; and, as this book only records journeys, and so may be said to keep moving, I hope it will be looked upon according to Act of Parliament. The papers of which it is composed were originally published in "All the Year Round" and "Household Words," and, by the kindness of Mr. Charles Dickens, I am allowed to reprint them. I have tried to make another harmonious book, by selecting only those articles which deal with one class of subjects, and which, in this case, with one exception, record only my own personal experiences. That exception is "The Last Stage-Coach," an article which is made of my own experience and an adventure met with by an intimate friend.

When I look through the contents of this volume, I remember that I am indebted to a great many gentlemen, who gave me every assistance in seeing what I have attempted to describe. My friend Mr. W. H. Wills furnished me with several valuable facts for the article on "Housetop Telegraphs;"

and my friend Mr. E. L. Blanchard suggested the journey called "On the Canal." Mr. Daniel Whittle Harvey, chief of the City Police; Mr. Fulton, of the Grand Junction Canal Company; Mr. Newton, of the Royal Mint; Mr. Gye, of the Royal Italian Opera House; and Mr. L. Maclean, of the Post Office; with my friends, Mr. Samuel Smiles, and Mr. E. J. Page, the Inspector-General of Mails, have opened many private doors for me where "no one is admitted except on business." To each, and all of them, I now tender my hearty thanks.

JOHN HOLLINGSHEAD.

LONDON, *September*, 1860.

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ODD JOURNEYS.

ON THE CANAL.

FIRST STAGE.

THERE was once a great musical artist who, in a moment of weakness, was prevailed upon by the delusive promises of American managers to leave the sea-girt shores of England, and make the perilous and dreaded passage of the Atlantic Ocean. The vessel in which he sailed was large and well-appointed. The officers and servants were kind, obedient, and attentive. There was every luxury that the most delicate and exacting passenger could require; and they made New York from Liverpool after a delightful run of twelve days and a-half. Such were the impressions of all the passengers except the unfortunate and deluded musical artist. He could not appreciate or avail himself of the registered size of the vessel, for it always seemed to him to be a monument floating perpendicularly in the air, with himself always lying helplessly and hopelessly at its base. The officers and servants appeared to him in the light of grinning demons.

He loathed the idea of food, and the mere thought of luxuries afflicted him with something like the premonitory pangs of death. According to his miserable reckoning, the voyage, or purgatory, lasted about two hundred and fifty years. When he reached land he was a shattered man; and it was long before he could delight his expectant audiences with that delicacy of tone and precision of execution which had gained him his European reputation, and made his name a familiar sound in the consol market of Great Britain. He wandered from end to end of the American continent. He performed in curious Mexican cities, and wild settlements where gold was plentiful but refinement scarce. Looking upon the surging sea with hate and loathing and horror, he never had the courage to return to the country which was waiting for him with open arms; and he died at last in a Peruvian boarding-house, and was buried under the shadow of a plant whose leaves were as thick as the leg of a man, and as broad as the fish-pond of an English mansion.

I have a perfect sympathy with this dead musical artist. I hate and dread the sea. Far from venturing across the Atlantic, I even avoid the Straits of Dover; and I obtain my chief knowledge of foreign countries from pictures, dioramas, panoramas, Murray, the continental Bradshaw, and the descriptive conversations of my more courageous and travelled friends.

Like all persons of a circumscribed experience, I have a tendency to depreciate that which I know very little about. It is my habit to consider the Rhine a very much over-rated river, lined on each side, like a tea-garden, with mock picturesque ruins, such as Messrs. Cubitt would be glad to build along the Thames or the Severn at a very moderate contract price. I call Paris hot and wearying; Brussels a provincial Paris; Vienna immoral; Holland foggy; and Berlin dull. Above all, I endeavour to impress all tourists with a strong sense of the duty of becoming home travellers, acquainted with the beauties of their own country, and the habits of their own countrymen. I set them an example by starting off with thick boots, a thick stick, scanty luggage strapped upon my back, and a very broad brimmed hat. I come back with wonderful stories of picturesque spots lying neglected almost under the very shadow of Saint Paul's Cathedral, and fabulous accounts of people and manners existing within a pistol-shot of Primrose Hill, or three hours' walk of Hyde Park Corner: less known to energetic travellers than the Kaffir races: more strange to cosmopolitan dandies than Aztec life. I have associated with gipsies, to be grievously disappointed at finding them nothing like the bright and cheerful beings represented in the pages of story-books, and in the pictures of the music-sellers, but very dirty, wretched, miserable tramps, whose real way of life I found to be

very unromantic and disagreeable, especially when the damp mists of the later autumn settled down upon the fields and woods, and they trod upon nothing better than the sere and yellow leaf. I have lived amongst railway navigators in a hut upon wheels, to be astonished at the wild and almost childlike simplicity of their nature, and the rude sense of order, justice, and honesty that existed in their strong bodies and feeble and uncultivated minds. Finally (as I am about to narrate), having nearly exhausted the land of my birth, I lately took to my natural enemy the water (but in its placidest condition), and, scorning to leave the country in which I was born and in which I hope to die, I glided for days and nights upon the silent byways of our inland canals; giving myself up without reserve to the unrestrained companionship of bargemen; accommodating my vast bulk to the confined space afforded by the crowded cabin of a Grand Junction Canal Company's fly-boat.

Having obtained the very readily accorded consent, advice, and assistance of the chairman of that Company, with the active and valuable co-operation of its obliging manager; one excessively wet evening in the month of August of the present year, I placed myself in a cab by the side of a friend and a large meat-pie, who were to attend me on the journey, and drove direct to the Company's offices in the City Road. There was a pleasing novelty in

the earliest commencement of the voyage. Ordinary tourists start from wharves near the Custom House, or Saint Katherine's Docks; old-fashioned inn-yards, or White Horse Cellars; large and noisy railway stations; and some from their own stables, with a dog-cart and a fast-trotting mare. I was an extraordinary tourist, and my point of starting was a basin. The cabman who was hired for the occasion seemed to be greatly astonished at the direction of his drive. He knew I meant travelling by the portmanteau, the hamper, and the carpet-bag; and many as were the travellers whom he had driven in his time to meet conveyances, he had never been ordered before to a barge-wharf by the side of a basin, since he first had the pleasure of wearing a badge.

Goods, bales, boxes, casks, and cases were the uniform rule at the Company's station, and passengers a startling and once in half-a-century exception. As we entered the large gas-lighted, roof-covered yard, amongst a group of Warwickshire, Staffordshire, and Lancashire bargemen, dressed in their short fustian trousers, heavy boots, red plush jackets, waistcoats with pearl buttons and fustian sleeves, and gay silk handkerchiefs slung loosely round their necks, we were looked upon as unwarrantable intruders, until received and conducted to our bounding bark by the attentive manager. We threaded our way between waggons, horses, cranes,

bales, and men, until we stood before the black pool of water that ran up from the basin under the Company's buildings. Here upon its inky bosom was the long thin form of the fly-boat Stourport, commanded by Captain Randle, in which it had been arranged we should make our journey on the canals as far as Birmingham, or even beyond that town if we felt so disposed. The captain and his crew, consisting of two men and a youth, were prepared for our arrival, and we found a good allowance of straw in the hold, and a very light cargo of goods on board—thanks to the vigilant care of the manager. It was past midnight when we took our places in the straw—my travelling friend, whom I shall call Cuddy, myself, the slender luggage, and the great meat-pie—and were poled out of the Company's wharf into the broad basin by two of Captain Randle's boatmen, while the captain steered and the third member of the crew went overland with the horse to meet the Stourport on the towing path of the Regent's Canal, at the further side of the Islington tunnel.

It will, perhaps, be proper at this point to describe our craft, not that she appeared anything but a shapeless mass by the slender light of a cloudy night (the rain had ceased), but our position and prospects will be rendered clearer by anticipating the knowledge that we gained in the morning.

The Stourport may be taken as a fair specimen of the fly-boats which are now employed in the carrying trade upon the canals that intersect England in every direction, joining each other, and covering a length of nearly two thousand five hundred miles. For the conveyance of heavy goods that do not require a rapid transit, these boats still maintain, and are always likely to maintain, their position, unaffected by railway competition; and it has been demonstrated that with the application of equal forces, canal carriage will move at the rate of two and a-half miles an hour—(the average speed of the fly-boats)—a weight nearly four times as great as railway carriage, and more than three times as great as turnpike-road carriage. These fly-boats belong to various individuals, firms, and companies scattered throughout the country; the largest owners being my worthy hosts, the Grand Junction Canal Company, who, in addition to being extensive canal proprietors, are also active carriers.

The length of the Stourport from stem to stern is about twenty yards; its breadth eight feet; and its depth nearly five feet. At intervals, along the centre of the hold, are upright poles and wedges, rising to a height of full five feet above the side edge of the boat; being a little higher in the middle than near the stem and stern. Along the tops of these poles are laid several planks which

join each other, forming a slightly bent bow over the whole length of the hold. This framework is covered with a thick black tarpaulin passed over the horizontal planks, fastened tightly near the edges of the boat, and kept down by ropes, running across at intervals, like hoops, from one end to the other. An open space is left near the centre of the hold, through which the boatmen descend and ascend when any goods require landing. Here it was, under cover of this gipsy-like tent, that our ample bed of straw was spread.

At the extreme head of the boat, beyond this timber and tarpaulin structure, is a heart-shaped platform, large enough to stand upon; and, like the boat generally, strongly constructed, to be defended from the constant concussions against the lock-gates, and the constant wear and tear caused by friction against the lock-walls. At the stern of the boat is the smallest conceivable cabin, in which the four men—captain and crew—contrive to sleep, to live, and to cook. It runs up shelvingly from the sides of the boat to nearly the height of the tarpaulin's back-bone; and is covered with a flat deck; making it like a box. As you stand up in the little cabin doorway—which runs in a short distance, leaving part of this deck on each side of you—you can place your elbows comfortably on the top, or drop a coal down into the cabin-fire through the chimney, which rises to the height of two feet,

close to the left side of your nose. Between the cabin-door, and the small, raised, fan-shaped platform, upon which stand the steersman and the tiller, there is a little passage, across the boat, so narrow that it looks like a plank ribbon. This completes the size and outline of the Stourport, Captain Randle, which, in every important respect, is a model of its sister fly-boats. Seen at some little distance, from a bridge, as they glide slowly and silently along the waters, these boats look very like the pictures of attenuated hippopotami floating down the African rivers.

We glide and bump, and bump and glide away from the lofty, hollow buildings of the Company, amidst the sound of echoing men's voices, and the splashing of poles in the water; slowly past the wharves, and factories, and tile and whitening stores that line the sides of the basin; plenty of time being allowed for observation, as our pace is very slow—as it will be all through the journey; for we have gone at one bound a century back in the history of conveyance, and must be satisfied with an uniform and almost imperceptible rate of from two to two and a-half miles an hour. Our progress is the result of the poling of the two boatmen who stand on the top of the tarpaulin structure; upon the ridge of the boards which continually oscillate over the water. Here—with a pole several yards long, and of the thickness of a

child's arm, with a hook and spike at the end, which is planted in the bed of the canal, and with the other end fixed under the arm—the boatman leans over the water, at a very dangerous angle, and impels the Stourport with its precious cargo, by a strong muscular walking-pressure of the feet upon the tarpaulin's back-bone.

About one o'clock in the morning we reached the Islington tunnel, and here we are enlightened as to another process of barge propulsion, called legging. A couple of strong thick boards, very like in shape to tailors' sleeve-boards, but twice the size, are hooked on to places formed on each side of the barge, near the head, from which they project like two raised oars. On these two narrow, insecure platforms, these two venturesome boatmen lie on their backs, holding on by grasping the board underneath, and with their legs, up to the waist, hanging over the water. A lantern, placed at the head of the barge, serves to light the operation, which consists in moving the Stourport through the black tunnel, by a measured side-step against the slimy, glistening walls; the right foot is first planted in a half-slanting direction, and the left foot is constantly brought over with a sweep to take the vacated place, until the right can recover its footing; like the operation known as "hands over" by young ladies who play upon the piano in a showy and gymnastic manner. The Stourport,

steered by its commander, Captain Randle, walks through the tunnel in the dead of the night, by the aid of its four stout legs, and its four heavily hob-nailed boots, that make a full echoing sound upon the walls like the measured clapping of hands, but disturb not the sleeping inmates of houses and kitchens under which they pass; many of whom, perhaps, are utterly ignorant of the black and barge-loaded Styx that flows beneath them.

We emerge from the tunnel, at last, and tackle to our horse. Our progress is then slow and steady, between the silent houses of Camden Town; past the anything but silent railway carrying establishment of the Messrs. Pickford; round the outskirts of the Regent's Park; under the overhanging trees of the Zoological Gardens; and through Saint John's Wood, to the termination of the Regent's Canal, and the commencement of the Grand Junction Canal, near the Harrow Road, at Paddington. About this time my friend and companion, Cuddy, who is remarkable for an appetite that requires satisfying at the most extraordinary times and seasons, could be restrained no longer from attacking the great meat-pie. A large watchman's lantern was handed down the hold; and, by its rather dim light, at exactly two A.M., the frugal meal began. The picture formed was of a mixed character; the pie, a bottle, and the grouping being suggestive of Teniers, while the lantern-light, and

its effects, were decidedly Rembrandtish. The picture struck the astonished gaze of a Paddington lock-keeper, who had been man and boy at that lock for five and twenty years, and who had never seen anything like it in the hold of a fly-barge—always devoted to bales, boxes, and casks—during the whole course of his long experience. He gazed in silence, and went away while the lock was filling with water, only to return and to indulge in another gaze. No one connected with the boat volunteered to enlighten him as to the cause of the very unusual spectacle; and, after a time, which the junction of the two locks allowed him for rumination, he came up to the side of the boat, close to the opening in the tarpaulin, and delivered himself of a few words to myself and Cuddy. It may be that he had been solacing the solitude of his hut with something of a comforting nature, and had issued with an over-developed sense of dignity and authority. It may be that his temper was a little soured by seeing the bottle, and receiving no invitation from the eccentric passengers and owners to partake of its contents. Anyway, his tone was thick, and his meaning unfriendly.

"I don't know who you are, an' I don't know who you may be," he began; "you may be all right, and you may not; but I'm here to do my duty."

Cuddy explained to him the very confined limits of that duty, which consisted in opening and shut-

ting the lock-gates, and seeing that no one threw dead dogs or cats in the water, to obstruct the channel. This remark had an irritating effect.

"Sir," he resumed, addressing himself particularly to Cuddy, who maddened him by drinking out of the bottle, "I don't know who you are, an' I don't know who you may be, but I know my duty; if I didn't, I hadn't ought to be here."

Something called him away at this point, for a moment; but he returned immediately to the attack.

"I see a party in the barge," he resumed, "and how do I know who they are?"

"How, indeed?" replied Cuddy.

"Very well; I know my duty. I don't know who you may be——"

Our barge had, by this time, cleared the locks, and the argumentative, but language-limited lock-keeper was left behind upon a brickwork promontory, struggling with his frozen eloquence, and with many conflicting emotions. He probably thought that Captain Randle was harbouring visitors without the knowledge of the Company; or that a secret mission of observance, a surveying expedition, or a pleasure-party of eccentric directors was floating on the canal; and, while he was anxious to assert his official existence, and to show himself in the eyes of the great unknown as a highly vigilant and meritorious officer, he was mad with curiosity to know the meaning of the unusual group in the hold of the

Stourport; and careful not to say anything that might be offensive to the ears of probable authority, travelling in disguise. No one had the charity to enlighten his ignorance, and he was left to pass the short remainder of the night, tossing uneasily upon his couch under the heavy load of a deep, dark mystery.

Before we leave the Regent's Canal, and join the Paddington branch of the Grand Junction Canal, to proceed in the direction of Uxbridge, we are received in the gauging-house of the Grand Junction Company, and the weight of luggage which we carry on board is measured by a barometer, which is dipped in the canal close to the sides of the vessel, fore and aft, and the results entered in a book, from which we are rated. This necessary examination is made in the interest of canal proprietors at every junction where a barge passes from one property to another. The Grand Junction Company charge tolls to their own barges, the same as to others, the accounts of the carrying trade, and the canal trade, being kept distinct. This ordeal concluded, we are fairly launched upon the inland canals, and our regular round of canal life begins. In front of us is our butty-barge (butty being a Staffordshire term for foreman), destined to be our companion through the journey, and undertake the duty of sending a man in advance with a key, to get the water prepared in the locks. This is done by the driver of the horse, and is no

inconsiderable task, when we know that there are nearly a hundred locks upon the Grand Junction property. The barges of all the large proprietors travel in tandem-pairs; and the task of lock-opening falls to the lot of the foremost barge. Each boat has a captain and three men, who work in lengths, or distances, of from six to ten miles; one man steering while the other drives, and attends to the locks; the other two sleeping or resting until their turns come to work the boat. The captain is responsible to the Company for the barge and the goods; and he receives a certain fixed payment in pounds sterling for the voyage. The crew of three men is employed, paid, and fed by the captain. The victualling of the vessel consists in shipping a sack of potatoes, a quantity of inferior tea, and about fifty pounds of meat at the beginning of the voyage; while large loaves of bread, weighing upwards of eight pounds, are got at certain places on the line of canal. If our pace is slow, it has the advantage of being incessant; for night or day we never stop, but keep on the even tenor of two and a-half miles an hour, except when, for about two minutes, we are delayed at each lock.

By degrees the novelty of our situation subsides a little, and we settle down for a few hours upon our straw bed. Cuddy is restless; and, having the weight of much historical information concerning canals upon his mind, which he has hastily crammed

from cyclopædias, and such books, in anticipation of our journey, he suddenly finds it necessary that he should communicate to me an account of early Chinese, Assyrian, and Roman claims to the introduction and improvement of this very useful, agreeable, and economical mode of conveyance. Finding that I do not feel a proper and intelligent interest in the early origin and struggles of canals; that I do not care how the Chinese dug them; what the Egyptians thought of them, or what the early Greeks called them; knowing that I am familiar with every step in the noble history of the energetic, single-minded Duke of Bridgewater, and his worthy engineer and companion, Brindley, and all they did for canal extension in England,—Cuddy (who is not a bore, or he would not have been invited to join me on this voyage) changes his ground. Leaving me to wallow in the ignorance which I seem to covet, he appeals with more chance of success to the weakest point about me—my imagination. As a basis of operation, he explains in a popular manner the nature and construction of canal-locks. He tells me how our frail bark, the Stourport, will be admitted into a deep, narrow, oblong, brick well; and how, as soon as we are in the dreadful trap, two massive iron-bound timber gates will close behind us in such a manner that the more the pressure is increased from behind, the tighter will they bind themselves together. Then he draws a fearfully vivid picture

of the two gates in front of us—a single, slender barrier, that alone opposes the advance of an ocean —a hundred thousand tons of water forty feet above our heads, fretting to be at us, like a bear looking down from his pole upon the tender children outside his pit. Cuddy candidly admits that this barrier is secured by powerful and well-tried machinery; but qualifies the admission by his description of the persons who are supposed to regulate the action of this machinery. He puts it to me, whether I ought to feel secure in resting where I am, while a feeble old man from the lock-house totters out of his bed in the dead of night, with a glimmering lantern in one hand, and the fatal lock-key in the other, groping his way to the awful barrier; or while the overworked, drowsy, and perhaps headstrong boy, who travels along the towing-path with the horse, rushes at the fearful flood-gates to play with the deluge. What can I expect, but to be dashed backward and forward in a savage maëlstrom; or hurled, like a straw, with trees, haystacks, cows, and farmhouses, over the distant meadows?

Very true, indeed, Cuddy, very true, indeed—but do not, for mercy's sake——be so——shocking—ly——graph—ic. Sleep came at last. A fitful, feverish sleep. A very inferior balm, and nothing like great Nature's second course.

It had lasted, perhaps, an hour, when it was abruptly broken by a violent bump, which caused

the devoted Stourport to tremble from stem to stern. Cuddy awoke, and sat upright; while I started instantly upon my legs. Everything was pitch-black. Not a gleam of light was visible. The rushing, hissing sound of bursting waters was all I heard. I realized our position in a moment; we had settled down in the bed of a lock, and the canal-flood had already closed over our heads. I flew to the spot where there had been an opening in the tarpaulin before we went to sleep, and tore it open. The moon was shining dimly in the sky, for it was now near daybreak. Our bark was certainly in the bed of a lock, rising gradually to the upper level close to the brick wall. The water was pouring in at the lock-gates; and the bump that had aroused us was the result of a more than usually violent concussion of the head of the boat against the upper gate timbers. The pitch-black darkness of the hold was caused by the fatherly tenderness of the boatman on duty; who, finding we were sleeping under the open tarpaulin, with a heavy dew coming down upon our unprotected heads, had drawn the rough and humble curtain without disturbing us, and had innocently added to the horrors of our nightmare.

"Cuddy," I said to my friend and companion, with something of severity in my tone, "let us have no more of these graphic descriptions, just upon the eve of slumber."

STAGE THE SECOND.

FURTHER sleep that night or morning, sound or unsound, on board the Stourport was impossible. We had experienced the effect of passing through our first night-lock; and, while comparing notes, we passed through a second, and then a third, until we decided that a bargeman's life was one continual bump.

Cuddy was aloft at half-past four, A.M., standing outside the opening in the tarpaulin upon the edge of the boat, holding on to the side ropes, examining the slow moving panorama of country, exchanging salutations with Captain Randle at the tiller, chirping popular airs from the "Barber of Seville," and glancing ravenously down at the great meat-pie. I arose, took my place at the opening on the other side, and found the morning fresh and cloudy; though giving promise of a fine day. Captain Randle's son was standing upon the narrow roof of the little cabin, beginning his toilet for the day, by combing his hair, that had been turned to a straw colour by much exposure to the air and sun. He was a light-eyed, full-blooded, red-cheeked, good-tempered, clean-looking young man of twenty-three. Presently he dipped a mop into the canal; drawing it carefully round the edges of a pair of remarkably heavy boots, that had never known

brush or blacking in this world, and never would. A bargeman's boot looks more as if it had been turned out of a blacksmith's forge, than a shoemaker's stall. It differs from a navvy's boot in being very loose. The navvy's boot is a laced-up article binding itself very close round the ankles—so close, in fact, that it seems a marvel how such powerful and gigantic bodies can be supported upon such frail props, without causing them to snap short off like pieces of tobacco-pipe. The bargeman's boot is an easy, full-sized blucher; with upper leather as thick as a moderate slice of bread and butter, and with soles like those worn by short performers who personate giants upon the stage. There is none of that finish, none of that rounding off, none of that dandy coarseness about them, which distinguishes the shooting-boots displayed for show in Regent Street windows, or which gentlemen drag after them when they go upon the moors. Rude, uncultivated strength is the main feature of the bargeman's boot. The sole absolutely bristles with a plantation of gooseberry-headed hobnails; the toe and heel heavily strengthened with massive bandages of iron. Twelve shillings a pair is paid to makers, who reside upon the canal banks, for these boots, and they must be dirt-cheap if only to sell for old metal. The bargeman's stocking is another peculiar manufacture, worsted in material, bright, clear blue in colour, ribbed and

knitted by village hands. It is twice the thickness of domestic worsted; serving perhaps as a shield to protect the foot from the attacks of the heavy boot. In other respects, the bargeman dresses chiefly in fustian. His trousers are always loose, short, and Dutch-built, and his jacket is a red or brown plush waistcoat with fustian sleeves. He wears a cap, a sailor's leather hat, or a brown hair structure, with a cloth top and a bright peak.

Captain Randle, who is still steering the Stourport, is a short man, between fifty and sixty years of age, with brown hands, a brown, honest-looking face, scanty light hair, small twinkling eyes, and a round lump of a nose. He looks fresh and clean, although he is yet unwashed, and has been up nearly all the night. Fifty years of his life have been spent upon the canals of his native land; and fifty years of a boatman's life means fifty years of boat. His land-home is in Stoke, in Staffordshire; and, although his chief line of route is now from London to Birmingham, and from Birmingham to Manchester, he does not leave his boat-home to pay it a visit above three times a-year. When he arrives at his destination he unships one load of goods, and takes in another, to return, without stopping, along the same road he came. Every tree, every bridge, every lock or house on the line of march is familiar to him as his own hands, and his reflections are not disturbed by the dangerous

and troublesome gifts of reading and writing. His son, the straw-haired young man, has been taught to steer through a printed book; but the old man constantly laments the fact that he is not "a scollard." Like many wiser and greater men, Captain Randle has a strong tendency to overrate that which he does not possess; and he fully believes that, grant him but the mysterious and to him unknown arts of reading and writing, and there would have been nothing to prevent him, when he was a younger man, from becoming the Lord Mayor of London.

The other boatman, who is sleeping in the cabin, and the youth who is driving the horse, are hearty creatures, with cheerful dispositions, large appetites, and little else to distinguish them.

After making a rough toilet with a bowl of water, a piece of yellow soap, and a coarse towel, we manage, with some dexterity, much exertion, and a little danger of falling overboard, to reach the small deck of the little cabin. This limited platform is the breakfast-table, dinner-table, tea-table, and sitting-room of the bargemen and their visitors during the summer months. If size is sometimes a luxury, smallness is sometimes a convenience; and as we take our breakfasts upon this poop—as Captain Randle calls it, in ambitious nautical phrase—we seem to have everything within our reach, and to be in the midst of everything.

The captain stands in the doorway of the little cabin, with the upper half of his body visible above the deck, and the lower half roasting in close contact with the cabin fire. He makes tea in a large tin teapot standing on the poop, which holds two quarts; and it is no trouble for him to stoop down and bring up the steaming kettle from the cabin stove. We sit on the edge of the deck, with our feet dangling over the water; and, while I am patiently waiting for the brewing of the refreshing beverage, Cuddy is preparing for a ferocious attack upon the once great, but now rapidly-diminishing, meat-pie. The whole crew is assembled upon the deck and the tiller platform, the horse being left to tow the boat unled, with his head deeply buried in a small tin milking-can full of provender—a novel kind of nose-bag specially provided for barge-towing horses, that they may move, and eat, and breathe, at one and the same time. The tea, a weak and curiously-flavoured drink, is served out in basins without saucers, and, above all, without milk, this luxury being unknown in the victualling department of an ordinary fly-boat. It is sweetened with light-coloured moist sugar, ladled out of a drawer in the cabin, and is stirred with some of the rudest spoons ever made. The knives and forks are worthy of their companions the spoons, and they must have come from Sheffield when that distinguished town was first struggling with the earliest rudiments of its

staple manufacture. The knife that Cuddy holds in his right hand, wherewith to demolish the pie, is a slice of iron, not unlike a Dutch razor in shape, and about half the size of a stage scimitar. It is stuck or wedged into a dark square wooden handle, that is indebted for any polish and smoothness it possesses to half a century's use, and the friction of Captain Randle's hard and bronzed hands. The fork has two prongs, one shorter than the other, and both black with the action of many years' grease and rust. The handle is much chipped and very discoloured, looking like a very dirty piece of dark yellow soap. These appearances must be taken as representing inherent defects in the cutlery, and not a want of cleanliness on the part of Captain Randle and his crew.

The boat, considering its limited space, and its four inhabitants (now swelled to six), is a model of tidiness; and in the intervals of sleep, or the pauses of work, the youth with the straw-coloured hair is always dusting everything about him with a short hair-broom. He takes a pride in the cabin department of the Stourport, as any one can easily see, even if the father did not constantly draw their attention to the fact; and if any brass knob could not have been kept bright; if the full-sized teapot would not have done for a looking-glass; or, if any one by spilling oil, or dropping any other filthy fluid, had soiled the virgin purity of that spotless poop or deck,

the young boatman with the straw-hair must have knocked somebody down or broken his heart.

It was well for us that the deck was kept clean, for our bread and butter had to rest upon it, without the usual domestic conveniences of plates. New as we were to our situation, we managed pretty well, although we occasionally suffered from a giddiness caused by the gliding motion of the boat, and a strong desire to drop over into the water. The hundred locks, which were destined to break our sleep, were also destined to disturb the even course of our meals. Every time we reached a gate —sometimes once in fifty yards—it was necessary to give up all considerations of eating and drinking, and to poise the basins of tea carefully in our hands, to prepare for the inevitable series of bumps and avoid a total spill. Curious as was the flavour, and mild as was the stimulus conveyed by this tea, it was the favourite and only drink, night and day—except water—not only of our own sturdy boatmen, but of all other sturdy boatmen, as far as my observation went. Beer and spirits were little used, and a pipe seemed to be a rare indulgence. Melancholy pictures of drunken brawls, improper language, constant fights, danger to life and property, hordes of licensed ruffians beyond the pale of law and order, which my cheerful friends had drawn the moment they heard of my intention to make an unprotected barge journey, all proved false before the experience of a

few hours, and shamefully false before the further experience of a few days. We were inmates of a new home and friends of a new family, whose members were honest, industrious, simple, and natural —too independent to stoop to the meanness of masquerading in adopted habits and manners, with a view of misleading the judgment of their guests.

As the morning developed, the promise of a fine day was fulfilled; and, passing through a brickkiln-looking country near Brentford, we proceeded in a zigzag direction towards Uxbridge and Rickmansworth. The further we went, the more did our long-cherished notions of the dry, utilitarian character of canals disappear, to give place to a feeling of admiration for the picturesque beauty of the country, and the artificial river, lying and running unheeded so near the metropolis. Now we were floating on a low level, deeply embowered in trees, which, in some places, nearly closed over our heads; now we were on a high level, commanding a view of woods and meadows, stretching away for miles; now we came to long avenues of stately trees, the valued heir-looms of ancient families and the growth of centuries; now we came to smoothly-shaven lawns, to parks, and gardens running down to the water's edge; now we came to long armies of tall, spear-shaped reeds, half rising from the water, and bowing with slow dignity and reverence as we passed by;

now we came to distant red-bricked mansions, playing at bo-peep amongst lofty trees; then, as the graceful windings of our river carried us further into the bosom of the parks, we saw them for a few minutes standing boldly out upon the brow of a hill, and then we lost them at another turn in the stream; now we came to little side brooks, which broke musically over small sparkling waterfalls, gliding into our silent by-way, which carried them gently away; now we came to old rope-worn bridges that stood out against a lofty background of rustling poplars, whose tops were only familiar to the cloud-loving sky-larks; now we came to other bridges, the arches of which seemed half full of shady water, and closed in with banks of shrubs and flowers, through which it would be cruel to force a passage; and now we passed little Ophelia-loved pools, overhung with willows, tinted with weeds, and silent as roadside graves.

Reclining here and there upon the rich grass banks, or standing solitary, or in groups of three or four, upon the towing path, were patient anglers, all having the stamp of dwellers in the closest portions of the metropolis. They were common men to look at—unshaven, unwashed; with ragged clothes and with dirty shirts. The railway had brought them in an hour, and for a few pence, from Whitechapel or Bethnal Green; and whatever they may have been in their own lives, and their own homes, they could

scarcely fail to gain a little improvement from the short communion with the country, to which they had been led by the allurement of their favourite sport. One man, who fished by himself, was a middle-aged Jew, bearing every appearance of days passed in some yellow back-parlour, behind a store of mouldy second-hand furniture up an Aldgate court.

Our horses are as docile, intelligent, and well-behaved as the trained steeds of the circus; and, for many miles, they are left to go on unled, chewing their provender in their milking-can nose-bags. When they are free from this encumbrance, and they stop too long at a broken part of the bank to drink out of the canal, they are urged on by a shouting of their names and a cracking of the short whip by the steersman thirty yards behind them. At bridges, where the towing-path does not pass under the arch, the mere unhooking of the rope is sufficient, and the horse, freed from the weight of the barge, walks quickly up the incline, over the bridge, and down to the path, even when, as is frequently the case, it changes to the other side of the canal. There he patiently waits until his burden floats through, and the rope is again hooked on.

The Grand Junction Canal, passing in a zigzag direction through parts of Middlesex, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, to Braunston, in Northamptonshire, is about forty-three feet in sur-

face breadth, upwards of ninety miles in length, and, with one or two falls, is on a gradual rise from Paddington, where it ends in a branch, to Braunston, where it begins in a guaging-house. The locks are expensive structures, costing, when double, two thousand pounds a-piece; and many of them are so close together, that they form a series of steps in a waterfall staircase. These lock-stations furnish nearly the only examples of land-life that we come in close contact with; for the general course of canals is to avoid, where it is possible, passing through the large towns and villages, and wind round the extreme ends, and distant outskirts of such places. Many of the lock-houses are very pretty. All of them are neat and clean. In some of the most important lock-houses, the keeper is seated in a little counting-house amongst his books and papers; in some of the smaller ones, rude accounts are kept in mysterious chalk signs upon the doorway or the walls. This is a favourite mode of recording business in broad open barges, engaged in carrying bricks, or other cargoes requiring to be reckoned by numbers; which numbers appear, not in numerals, but in broad chalk lines, marked on the sides of the hold. At all the lock-houses, coy little gardens peep out, and many of them are profusely decorated with flowers both inside and outside. One cottage on the canal bank, connected with the canal traffic, is such a complete nosegay,

that the word Office, and the City arms painted over its doorway, are scarcely visible for roses.

While the Stourport is working slowly through the foaming, eddying locks, and we are reclining upon its poop, or sitting astride of its tarpaulin's back-bone, we are objects of interest and curiosity to the lock-keepers, who salute us with "Good morning," or remarks about the day, while their wives and daughters peep slyly at the two unusual strangers from behind the thin shelter of their cottage curtains.

For strangers we are, and very mysterious strangers, too, especially to the not over keen intellect of Captain Randle. Any idea that he may at one time have entertained about our being upon a scientific engineering expedition, having reference to the present condition of the canal, must have been entirely dispelled by our gross ignorance of practical details. Sometimes, I fancy, Captain Randle had a vague notion that I was a person of enormous capital, bent upon purchasing the whole plant and business of his masters, the Company; and at these periods he must have had grave misgivings about the prudence of the worthy chairman and manager, who had sent us upon our tour of inspection in a lightly-loaded barge. Long before the shades of the first evening had fallen upon our journey, both the captain and the straw-haired young man had thoroughly settled that Cuddy was

my favourite, cherished, and faithful body-servant, and he was accordingly addressed, after this, by the whole of the crew, by the familiar title of William. To add to the mystery of our presence, a French classic belonging to Cuddy was found upon the deck, and handed by the captain to the straw-coloured young man (the only one amongst the crew who could read) to decipher. Of course he failed to make anything of it, although we had not the pleasure of witnessing his attempt, and the book was placed carefully again upon the spot where it was found. Although I had heard the most wonderful distortion of language coming from the lips of the captain, such as saying "useful matches," under the notion that he was calling for lucifers; and, although I felt certain that any conversation with Cuddy, within hearing of our commander, was strictly private, incomprehensible, and confidential when carried on in words of two or more syllables, I could not resist the unamiable desire of accusing Captain Randle of a secret indulgence in the literary riddle belonging to my friend.

"Noa, Must'r Olly," he said, in a somewhat melancholy tone, slowly shaking his head (he called me Must'r Olly, although it bore only the faintest resemblance to my name, from the same cause that made him turn lucifer into useful). "Noa, I bean't a scollard; an' if I was, I couldn't read that!"

"Why not?" I inquired.

"Why?" he replied, with a simple smile of wonder, slightly raising his voice, and pointing to his straw-haired son; "*he* can't make onythin' of that, an' he can read a'most onythin'! You see, Must'r Olly," continued the old man, following out a train of reflection he had fallen into, "I'm a Coompany's man, an' I can't be messed about. I've been on these canals now, man an' boy, nigh fifty year, most o' that time wi' Mussrs. Pickford, an' I've lived long enough to know that England is noa place for a doonce."

"Well, but," interposed Cuddy, with a good-humoured intention, "you've worked hard, have done your duty, and are not very badly off, after all."

"Noa, William," returned Captain Randle, addressing himself to Cuddy. "Noa, I'm not; an' if I left the boat to-morrow, I shouldn't starve, for I've managed to put by a pund or two in my time."

This little property, to which the old man alluded, was, perhaps, about two hundred pounds; and, like all persons who have saved money under difficult circumstances, he was proud of his small possessions, and hinted at them on many occasions during the voyage.

"Noa," he continued, still running, with an amiable and a characteristic weakness, upon the same idea, "I be a doonce, an' I knows it; but I

made my boy larn to read an' write, an' if I could affoord it, he shouldn't be 'ere now."

"You haven't lost much, Randle," I said, to comfort him, "by not knowing how to read. You're well and hearty, anyhow, although near sixty."

"Yes, Must'r Olly, he said, "I'm 'arty, thank Gawd; I eat an' sleep well, an' I can wurk well, though I'm goin' a little at the bottom of my feet."

I was not surprised to hear of a little tenderness at the sole of the foot, considering the weight and make of a bargeman's boot, and his proficiency and frequent practice of the art of "legging" under tunnels.

"This be a hard life, Must'r Olly, in winter time," continued the captain, "an' I'd be well out of it at my age, if I could see onythin' to do me ony good. If I'd been a scollard when Mussrs. Pickford broke up their boat-trade, ten years ago, I might a kep' on wi' 'em, and done somethin'; but I'm a Coompany's man, an' can't be messed about; an' when they wanted to make a porter of me at the rail'yes, I was obleeged to be off; and they sed, 'It's no use: he means boatin', he does, so give him his crakter, and let him go.'"

Captain Randle fully believed that, by simply writing and reading, he might, at this moment, have been sitting in the manager's chair at Messrs. Pick-

ford's offices; little knowing how very cheap, of late years, those accomplishments have become in the labour-market of his country. The tone in which he spoke of his intellectual deficiencies was affecting from its simple and honest depth of feeling; and it stopped any further attempts, on the part of Cuddy and myself, to play with this point in the old man's nature.

Man cannot be fed upon scenery and the outpourings of character, and in due course we find it necessary to take another meal. Dinner it ought to be called, according to the rotation in which it comes; but the meat-pie having been devoured (chiefly by Cuddy), and the fifty pounds of beef taken in at London, and all boiled off at once to insure its keeping fresh, not being to our taste, we are obliged to put up with a substantial tea—Cuddy officiating in the cabin as boiler of eggs and preparer of coffee. I go down to witness this interesting operation, paying my first visit to the small cabin, and gaining an opportunity of examining its fittings and dimensions. The kettle has boiled for some time, so the fire is low, and the heat is what the boatmen call moderate—like an oven about an hour after the bakings have been withdrawn. There can be no doubt that the cabin of the Stourport is the smallest place of its kind in the whole world; yet one half of it is divided off for the bed, which rests under a wooden arch at the end of the cabin, immediately

opposite the doorway. This bed, with close packing, accommodates two men during their short turns-in for sleep, who lie under a piece of rope, a whip, a scrubbing-brush, an old umbrella, and a saw, all hooked on to the low roof. The bed rests in a perfect nest of cupboards, large and small, the doors of which are fitted with hooks that hold caps, brushes, and various small and necessary articles. The bed and clothes are very clean, and the painted decorations round the edge of the arch and on the doors were once gaudy, but are now faded. From the foot of the steps, running up to the arch, on the right-hand side of the cabin as you enter, is a low seat, large enough for two persons, and, of course, constructed with a lid to form a box. Opposite this seat, also close to the arch, is a piece of furniture not unlike a compressed old-fashioned book-case. The upper part consists of crowded shelves placed in a gothic-arched framework, which is closed with a door whose hinges are at the bottom, and which fastens at the top with a spring. When this door is closed, it displays upon its surface a small round looking-glass, in which a boatman may shave, or comb his hair; and, when it is opened, it turns down upon its hinges, standing out, self-supported, at right angles, and forming the only table of the cabin. Close against the doorway of the cabin comes the stove, a substantial structure, with a low grate, a deep blower, a round fender (part of the

stove), and a narrow funnel passing upwards through the low roof. Against the wall, near this stove, is a small oil-lamp; and over the cabin seat are more cupboards and shelves. Swinging from the roof is a water-can, which strikes your head when you stand upright; and near your feet is a tub, into which it is almost impossible to prevent stepping. The ship's papers are strapped on to the ceiling, and every inch of space is carefully economized. Everything is scrupulously neat and clean, and wherever a piece of metal is visible, that metal is sure to shine. The Stourport is rather faded in its décorations, and is not a gay specimen of the fly-barge in all its glory of cabin paint and varnish; but still enough remains to show what it was in its younger days, and what it will be again when it gets a week in dock for repairs at Birmingham. The boatman lavishes all his taste, all his rude, uncultivated love for the fine arts, upon the external and internal ornaments of his floating home. His chosen colours are red, yellow, and blue: all so bright that, when newly laid on and appearing under the rays of a mid-day sun, they are too much for the unprotected eye of the unaccustomed stranger. The two sides of the cabin, seen from the bank and the towing-path, present a couple of landscapes, in which there is a lake, a castle, a sailing-boat, and a range of mountains, painted after the style of the great teaboard school of art. If the Stourport cannot match many of its

companions in the freshness of its cabin decorations, it can eclipse every other barge upon the canal in the brilliancy of a new two-gallon water-can, shipped from a bankside painter's yard, at an early period of the journey. It displayed no fewer than six dazzling and fanciful composition landscapes, several gaudy wreaths of flowers, and the name of its proud proprietor, Thomas Randle, running round the centre upon a background of blinding yellow.

Small as the Stourport cabin is for four full-grown boatmen (leaving out its two present visitors), cabins just as small, and furnished in most respects in the same manner, are made to accommodate large families that spring up amongst the river population.

The Grand Junction Canal Company do not allow any of their barges to be turned into what are called family-boats; but amongst the small proprietors there is no such restriction; while the slow-boats, or boats that only travel during the day, resting at night, because towed without a change of horses, belong, in most cases, to the men who conduct them, and who, of course, are free to act as they think proper. The way this freedom is exercised is shown by the pictures of family-barges, and their internal economy, which pass us at every turn. There is the boatman, and his wife, a stout, sunburnt woman, and children, varying in number from two to ten, and in ages from three weeks to twelve

years. The youngest of these helpless little ones, dirty, ragged, and stunted in growth, are confined in the close recesses of the cabin (the tarpaulin-covered part of the boat is inaccessible to children), stuck round the bed, like images upon a shelf; sitting upon the cabin-seat; standing in pans and tubs; rolling helplessly upon the floor, within a few inches of a fierce fire and a steaming kettle; leaning over the edge of the boat in the little passage between the cabin-doorway and the tiller-platform, with their bodies nearly in the water; lying upon the poop, with no barrier to protect them from being shaken into the canal; fretful for want of room, air, and amusement; always beneath the feet of the mother, and being cuffed and scolded for that which they cannot avoid; sickly, even under their sunburnt skins; waiting wearily for the time when their little limbs will be strong enough to trot along the towing-path; or dropping suddenly over the gaudy sides of the boat, quietly into the open, hungry arms of death. When these helpless creatures reach five or six years of age, they are intrusted with a whip, and made useful to their thoughtless parents, by night and day, as drivers of the horse that tows the boat. There are little tender girls, in heavy boots, slouched sun-bonnets, and dusty clothes, running on either side of the rope, or under the horse's legs; tugging at the harness; maddening the animal with all a child's impatience; and imi-

tating the coarseness and violence of a boatman's voice and gesture, with all a child's exaggeration and power of mimicry. Not a week passes but what one of these canal-children is drowned in the silent byway upon which they were born; and, painful as the incident is, it is too common to excite much observation.

Captain Randle shakes his head mournfully when we talk of these things.

STAGE THE THIRD.

ANOTHER feverish night of lock-bumping, roaring of small cataracts, and, this time, the puffing of a wheezy engine pumping water from a low reservoir into a high level part of the canal, and we arose from our hold very early to be conscious of the absolute necessity of providing our morning's breakfast. We had coffee, and we had stale bread; while the Stourport larder had also stale bread, many pounds of the beef, and some of the inferior tea, still on board. But we were getting dainty—hungering, not exactly after the flesh-pots of that civilized Egypt we had left behind us, but after rural luxuries, familiar to us in the pages of those poetical rhapsodists who are never tired of singing the praises of the country. Where were the new-laid eggs? where were the fowls that laid them?

where were the autumnal fruits? where was the delicate bacon? the cottage bread? the cream as thick as paste? We were sensible of feeling money in our pockets, and we demanded to be fed; and we consulted Captain Randle upon this important subject. That experienced commander would not give us a plain, direct answer, but encouraged us with the hope of reaching a village bordering upon a lock in about an hour, where he thought, in all probability, we should get what we required. He was only artfully concealing his ignorance; for, familiar as he was with the line of route, he knew less than an infant about the commercial provision-supplying capabilities of the towns and stations on the canal, for the very sufficient reason that he never had had occasion to test them. His phantom promised village seemed to recede as we advanced, until we had almost given it up, when we came upon it suddenly through a bridge, about half-past six in the morning. A glance at the High Street showed us in a moment what a stony-hearted, fruitless place we had at last fallen upon. It was nothing but a collection of thatched barns, with closed yellow curtains, and sleeping inmates; while the damp white mist came steaming along from the small silent church, making, at best, a cheerless picture in the eyes of two hungry travellers. The crowing of a distant cock only added to the melancholy idea of hopeless solitude. We turned with

heavy hearts, and retraced our steps over the bridge to the barge, to reproach Captain Randle with his perfidy. On the towing-path, we came full upon an old man carrying two large pails of fresh milk, just drawn from a group of cows now standing empty in the neighbouring meadows. Our desire to purchase some of this precious fluid was treated with moody silence, not to say surly contempt; and, when we offered a price gradually rising until it reached the height of one shilling a pint, with no visible effect upon the holder, we felt very much inclined for a little highway robbery. We were only saved from this crime by the interference of our deceitful captain, who told us the milk belonged to the carrier's master in the town, and that it was "as good as the place of the mon wur worth, if he dared to sell a thimbleful." The man might have told us this himself, if he had not been a boor.

We went on to the lock, and found a cottage where two loaves of bread, a blacking-bottle, some hearthstone, and a few balls of worsted were displayed in the window; and, after knocking hopefully at the door, it was slowly opened by a youth, who stood across the step as if to impede our entrance, while a middle-aged woman, most probably his mother, sat upon her chair by a table in the room, without taking the slightest notice of two such wealthy and anxious customers. We found that our canal journey had brought us to a land

where the ordinary relations of buyer and seller were reversed; where it was looked upon as a favour granted when an article was sold; as an obligation incurred when an article was allowed to be purchased. We were kept at a respectful distance by the owners of the cottage-shop on the canal bank, and graciously allowed to buy a few eggs and some bacon; for nothing more could be seen, except large loaves of stale bread, which we had already more than enough of on board the Stourport. We managed to make a tolerable breakfast with our purchases, and Cuddy distinguished himself particularly by the manner in which he made a number of eggs supply the place of milk in the coffee. Captain Randle looked on, and regarded us with a half-fatherly interest, at the same time that he felt we were problems which he should never be able to solve.

The captain always spoke of the "Coompany," as if they stood bodily before him in the persons of one or two individuals, and not as a pure abstraction which he had no personal acquaintance with. He must have had a pretty fair idea, too, of the number of shareholders, by the way in which he reckoned a dead horse as a loss to them of only fourpence a-piece. Captain Randle's life had not been very eventful, nor his experience very wide, and he was, consequently, rather limited in his topics of conversation. His stories were not nu-

merous, and his mind seemed to run very much upon three or four ideas, which he clung to with characteristic pertinacity, as being his only holds upon the past.

His son, the straw-haired boy, had, some years ago, fallen into a lock, along with the horse that was towing the boat. The boy sank beneath the animal, but was got out after great difficulty, the horse being drowned. The old man had to report at headquarters, as a matter of form, the nature of an accident that had caused the Company the loss of a horse; and whether, anticipating a demand being made upon him for the value of the animal, he had, with great difficulty, arrived at an exact estimate of the amount of individual loss to each shareholder, I cannot tell; but he certainly never missed an opportunity of saying to me, when telling the story—

"You see, Must'r Olly, it wur only fourpence a-piece, all round."

Another of Captain Randle's fixed ideas was a wonderful faith in the abilities of a brother who had recently died, and who appeared to have been the wild erratic genius of the family.

"Ah, Must'r Olly," said the old man, "he wur always drinkun' and fighten' about; an' if ony mon said anythin' to him, he could cut him loike a knife. Dear, dear, he wur a room chap, poor Bill; I've seen him stan' on's head on a table dancin' a 'orn-

pipe in the air like mad. But he never did ony good for hissel', Must'r Olly; never ony good."

It was while in familiar conversation with Captain Randle, allowing him to convey his own small stock of stories and ideas uninterruptedly in his own way, that he made us acquainted with a great contractor, whose operations, if only allowed to develop, would have rivalled in magnitude and money value anything ever accomplished by Mr. Peto or Mr. Cubitt. This unknown contractor may have had little existence, except in the brain of Captain Randle; but that did not prevent our worthy commander from bringing him before us, with his offers to the Company, at almost every hour of the day. Never did we mention to the captain that the canal was making a wide circuit without much progress through the country; never did we come to one of those gradual, step by step, rises in the ground, and an expensive little staircase of locks; without being told what this great unknown contractor had offered to do.

"You see, Must'r Olly," said the captain, "what this Coompany wants is another toonnel, runnin' under that groun' yander, an' cutting off sixteen locks at once."

"An expensive job, captain," I replied.

"Must'r Olly," he continued impressively, "this 'mon told the Coompany they'd save it in twenty year, an' he offered to do it for a million an' a 'arf."

"Who is this man, dealing in such large sums?" asked Cuddy.

"Well, he be a lock-keeper, William," said the captain.

I endeavoured to explain to our commander (but with no effect), how gladly many contractors would have undertaken the proposed task for something considerably less.

"Noa, Must'r Olly," he said; "a million an' a 'arf is what he offered to do it for; an' he told the Coompany it would be the making of 'em."

By this time the sun was getting high in the heavens, and we had finished breakfast; while Captain Randle was now busy dishing up an early dinner for himself and his men. This consisted of large lumps of the boiled beef, mixed with slices of bacon, and all fried together in a pan. When it was put upon a plate on the deck, by the side of an eight pound mountain of bread, the salt-box, and the pepper-box, it looked so very fat, so very yellow, and so very greasy, that Cuddy, who frames his conduct upon polite models, thought we ought, in common courtesy, to leave the boatmen to enjoy their meal undisturbed. Before his thoughtful suggestion could be carried into execution, and we had leaped off the barge on to the towing-path, under a bridge, to take a morning's walk, Captain Randle detained us for a few minutes by a favourite question, which he always would put to us when the Stourport's

victualling system was in any way brought under notice.

The captain felt a complete identity of interest with his butcher, with whom he had dealt for upwards of twenty-five years; and he was always asking us, what estimate we could form of the probable extent of this great provision-dealer's business.

"How many beasts d'ye think he killed last Tuesday?" inquired the captain.

"Two," we said, by way of a wild answer.

"Fifty beasts!" returned the captain. "How many on Friday?"

"Four."

"Thirty-nine."

"And as fine as that beef on the plate?" I inquired.

"Ev'ry one," returned the captain, in an outburst of admiration; adding, "I can't be messed about wi' a lot o' small butchers, Must'r Olly."

Leaving the Stourport a little way behind us, we caught up to our butty-boat—the barge in advance—and made a more intimate acquaintance with one of its men; a cheerful, playful giant, whom we had observed in the distance, on many occasions during the last two days, gamboling upon the towing-path. He was about six feet three in height, not very upright in body, although not more than twenty-eight years of age; and as red in the face as any North

American Indian. He was dressed in very loose trousers, the usual heavy boots, and a common white shirt, which he wore wide open at the chest, and rolled up above the elbows. Everything that this giant did was rude, clumsy, violent, energetic. He never walked quietly by the side of the horse, but was always breaking into a loose, straggling run, throwing his long and powerful legs wildly from side to side, and making an iron clatter upon the pathway that denoted an amount of wear and tear almost equal to the action of a horse. The giant seemed to have no fear of a sun-stroke, for he coqueted with it like a salamander. The burning rays poured down upon his face and neck, making them shine like a copper tea-kettle; yet the playful Titan kept plunging on; every bone in his body jolting as he went. I do not believe the horse he was driving was naturally a restive and refractory animal, except under a strong sense of physical rivalry, which it felt by the side of its driver. If it had only been left alone, it would have gone on quietly and steadily enough, after the fashion of its brother canal-horses; or, with a feeble driver, it would have submitted with a dignified grace, conscious of superior strength held back by an amiable disposition. But the brawny giant, who was yelling, shouting, whip-cracking, and war-dancing round its head, presented the appearance of a foeman; and the noble animal consequently started against the bank, and

would have butted his tormentor, if it had not been held back by the checking power of the towing-rope. I am afraid that the mixture of the mariner and the carter, presented in the person of nearly every boatman, is not conducive to the proper understanding of the nature and character of horses.

We left the cheerful giant struggling with his enemy, and walked on sharply by the sides of the field-bordered stream. It was at this moment of our canal-existence that some demon whispered to Cuddy, "Have a fowl for dinner." We were never particularly fond of bacon, and we began to loathe eggs; for we had had them to eat at our breakfast, to drink in our coffee, boiled and fried for our dinner, and there was still the prospect of them before us for our next meal. For this reason, if for nothing else, we cultivated the idea of the fowl, and began to look sharply about us for the prospect of realizing it. On we wandered for many miles by the side of the canal, the two barges following in our rear, glancing carefully right and left, without coming to any village or house, and without meeting any living thing. At last we reached a melancholy canal-side tavern; where nothing was to be got but a very thin and sour ale, and where we were given to understand, in answer to our anxious inquiries, that in those parts the common barn-fowl was a bird almost as scarce as the celebrated dodo.

On again we walked, with increasing appetites

and decreasing hopes, until we came upon the village of Stoke Brewin, not far from the mouth of the celebrated Blisworth Canal tunnel, through which we were to pass on board the Stourport. Stoke Brewin is one small cottage street, with many outlying barns;—a village that does not covet the patronage of strangers. The first inquiry we made respecting this phantom fowl, was addressed to an old woman standing at the door of a thatched hut.

"A vowl, measter?" she asked, in astonishment. "What, a live vowl?"

"No, ma'am," I said; "a dead fowl, for cooking."

"Dead or alive," said Cuddy, who was more desperate.

"I'm sure I doan't know, measter," returned the old woman; "I doan't think onybody be havin' such a thing in Stoke. Ye can try of Must'r Edwards, at the corner."

The corner alluded to was only a few yards off, and we made rapidly towards Mr. Edwards's cottage. There was Mr. Edwards, a fat man, standing in the low doorway, shaking his head at us as if we had been vagrant tramps, or he had never heard of such a bird as a fowl during the whole of his village existence. Turning our backs very quickly upon Mr. Edwards, we strode along the short street until we came to the village butcher's, whose shop was a little larger than the Stourport cabin, and would

not have contained much animal food if it had been filled to overflowing. It was as clean as the cage of a wild beast an hour after feeding-time. Not a scrap of anything was visible but a piece of suet the size of a nut, upon which a dozen ravenous flies and a blue-bottle had settled. This was a state of things that required explanation, and we proceeded through the shop and tapped at the half-curtained door-window of the back-parlour. This was at once opened, and we saw the master of the shop devouring part of the only leg of mutton upon the premises.

"Two shillings a pound for that leg of mutton," said Cuddy, without the slightest hesitation.

"Noa," said the man sulkily, seeming to understand the eccentric but very natural offer; "there bean't too much 'ere fur my fam'ly, an' I wun't sell to ony mun."

Further higgling was useless, and we left this mockery of a shop, with the highway-robber part of our character again strongly developed.

"I tell you what, Cuddy," I said, "a twenty-pound note in one's pocket at Stoke Brewin is not of so much use as a pipe-light. We'd better declare on the parish."

A few more steps brought us to the canal bank, where we found another foodless tavern stocked with the thin, sour ale; and as the Stourport and its butty-barge had not yet arrived, we entered the

pale of mild dissipation to drink ourselves into a better humour.

"I suppose Landun be very dool, now?" inquired the young lady who served us with the beer.

"Dull!" almost shouted Cuddy, whose gallantry was quite gone; "the dullest street in the dullest part of the City, at the dullest time of the day, and the dullest part of the year, is a bear-garden compared with Stoke Brewin!"

I started from the house upon hearing this speech, and was soon followed by Cuddy. We found our friendly Stourport lying in the lock ready to receive us; and by this time we understood the forethought and prudence displayed in victualling the boat at London with fifty pounds of beef, obtained from the great butcher who sacrificed a hundred beasts a-week.

The boatmen were preparing for the passage of the Blisworth tunnel (nearly two miles in length), an underground journey of an hour's duration. The horses were unhooked, and while standing in a group upon the towing-path, one of the child-drivers, a girl about six years of age, got in between them with a whip, driving them, like a young Amazon, right and left; utterly disregarding the frantic yells of a dozen boatmen, and nearly half a dozen family-boatmen's wives. At the mouth of the tunnel were a number of leggers, waiting to be employed; their charge being one shilling to leg

the boat through. We engaged one of these labourers for our boat to divide the duty with one of our boatmen; while the youth went overland with the horse. A lantern was put at the head of the boat; the narrow boards, like tailors' sleeve-boards, were hooked on like projecting oars near the head; the two legging men took their places upon these slender platforms, lying upon their backs; and, with their feet placed horizontally against the wall, they proceeded to shove us with measured tread through the long, dark tunnel.

The place felt delightfully cool, going in out of the full glare of a fierce noon-day sun; and this effect was increased by the dripping of water from the roof; and the noise caused by springs which broke in at various parts of the tunnel. The cooking on board the boats went on as usual, and our space being confined, and our air limited, we were regaled with several flavours springing from meat, amongst which the smell of hashed mutton certainly predominated. To beguile the tedium of the slow, dark journey—to amuse the leggers, whose work is fearfully hard, and acts upon the breath after the first quarter of a mile, and above all to avail themselves of the atmospheric effects of the tunnel, the boatmen at the tillers nearly all sing, and our vocalist was the captain's straw-haired son.

If any observer will take the trouble to examine the character of the songs that obtain the greatest

popularity amongst men and women engaged in heavy and laborious employments, he will find that the ruling favourite is the plaintive ballad. Comic songs are hardly known. The main secret of the wide popularity of the ballad lies in the fact, that it generally contains a story, and is written in a measure that fits easily into a slow, drawling, breath-taking tune which all the lower orders know; and which, as far as I can find, has never been written or printed upon paper; but has been handed down from father or mother to son and daughter, from generation to generation, from the remotest times. The plots of these ballad stories are generally based upon the passion of love; love of the most hopeless and melancholy kind; and the suicide of the heroine, by drowning in a river, is a poetical occurrence as common as jealousy.

There may have been a dozen of these ballads chanted in the Blisworth tunnel at the same time; the wail of our straw-haired singer rising above the rest. They came upon our ears, mixed with the splashing of water, in drowsy cadences, and at long intervals, like the moaning of a maniac chained to a wall. The effect upon the mind was, in this dark passage, to create a wholesome belief in the existence of large masses of misery, and the utter nothingness of the things of the upper world.

We were apprised of the approach of another barge, by the strange figure of a boatman, who

stood at the head with a light. It was necessary to leave off legging, for the boats to pass each other, and the leggers waited until the last moment when a concussion seemed inevitable, and then sprang instantaneously, with singular dexterity, on to the sides of their boats, pulling their narrow platforms up immediately after them. The action of the light in front of our boat produced a very fantastic shadow of our recumbent boatman-legger upon the side wall of the tunnel. As his two legs stuck out horizontally from the edge of the legging-board, treading, one over the other, against the wall, they threw a shadow of two arms, which seemed to be held by a thin old man—another shadow of the same substance—bent nearly double at the stomach, who worked them over and over, as if turning two great mangle-handles with both hands at the same time.

Out of the tunnel, we were again haunted by the idea of a phantom fowl. On one side was a fine old granary, that might have been in Holland over a dyke, with cranes and horses; making some show of life, and on the other side were the thatched roofs of another feeble village. We ventured over the bridge, grasping our despicable money in our hands, and found a small, ancient, lopsided shop, which had, probably, heard in its time the tramp of Cromwell's soldiers, and had seen the face of the grim Protector himself: over its window was a square stone let into the wall, bearing the date of

Anno Domini sixteen hundred and twelve. This, too, was a venerable abode of stagnant commerce. We asked for some butter, but this could not be granted to us without an old man being consulted in the back-parlour, and after some little delay, we were told that we could have one quarter of a pound, and no more; the regular consumption of the village, and the exact nicety of the supply, not allowing any very wide margin for hungry strangers.

The common fowl being unknown in this village, we returned direct to our boat, with our very scanty, but welcome purchases, and comforted ourselves with another tea. Milk—our first milk for two days—had been got, in the meantime, by one of the boatmen; and although it had little but its freshness to recommend it, having been well skimmed (Oh, the deluding country!), we settled down too happy to get anything like milk, to be very fastidious or discontented.

On we still glided, gently and silently, through broad, deep valleys; past the fringed edges of woods; past distant towns and churches amongst the hills and trees; past clumps of haystacks and farmhouse barns, lying deep below us in the distant meadows; and past lofty stone halls and broad mansions, where the slender deer gambolled close to the open doorways, and the broad, flower-bordered flights of steps.

While we were openly expressing our admiration

of the prospect, which we might with justice have done every hour from Brentford up to the present time, we had an opportunity of forming an idea of a young boatman's taste in female beauty and country houses.

"That's a nice gal," said our straw-haired young man, who was engaged at the tiller; and who drew our attention to a young woman driving a horse along the towing-path. She was dressed in a short-waisted, short-skirted, blue cotton frock, a pair of laced-up, heavy boots—a little less heavy than a boatman's boot—and her bonnet was a quilted cowl that hung in flaps upon her shoulders, and formed a tunnel in front, at the dark end of which was her half-hidden face.

To do her justice, she was clean and not coarse; she was youthful, and may have been lovely in the young boatman's eyes.

"You know her, you young dog!" both Cuddy and myself shouted to the straw-haired youth.

"She's the nicest gal on the canal," returned our young boatman, evasively.

"Who is she?" we asked.

"That's her feyther," he said. "He owns that barge."

Many boats had passed us, from time to time, belonging to small proprietors; which, without being strictly family boats, in the most deplorable sense of the term, were worked by members of the same

family, as in the case of this father and daughter. One barge that passed us was a bridal barge; the proprietor-captain having that day entered upon the marriage state; and the funnel was ornamented with a bunch of white ribbons. The boatman never loses an opportunity for a little extra decoration; and our own Stourport, in honour of our visit, displayed a couple of small, highly-coloured tin pictures of flags, pinned with ribbon-streamers to our cabin funnel.

"Now," the straw-haired young man had previously said, "we're coomin' to the finest house on the canal."

We looked out sharply to see the boatman's notion of the finest house; having already floated by many park-residences that we thought could scarcely be equalled, much less surpassed. It was as we expected. The finest house in the young boatman's eyes, was a long, flat, small, county-gaol looking building; very brazen and vulgar in appearance; built with several-coloured bricks, and standing in the middle of the only low meadow-land we had passed for some time. Its owner was a man who had made money in the whalebone trade (all honour to his ability and industry), and his whim was to have his chief doorway bordered with small whale's teeth; and to build a boat-house upon the canal-bank, the entrance to which was under two large whale's teeth.

One noble mansion that we passed—very unlike the whalebone dealer's palace of retirement—seemed to stand upon the summit of a mountain of rich, dense trees. It was the home of one of the largest shareholders in the Canal Company; and our young boatman told us stories of alarming deputations of distressed bargemen waiting upon the owner to solicit relief, when frozen out by the ice, which sometimes closes the canals for weeks. The boatmen, even now, were beginning to speculate upon the probable mildness or severity of the approaching winter—a dreaded season, when canal-life becomes nothing but days and nights of exposure to drifting sleet, keen winds, and heavy snow, or cold soaking rain.

Not far from Braunston in Northamptonshire (the head of the Grand Junction Canal), we came upon a small boatman's village. It was the only place we had seen on our journey where the people on the land seemed to belong to the people on the water; where everybody knew everybody, and seemed glad to see everybody, and where there was some provision made for a boatman's requirements—to say nothing of his hungry friends and visitors.

This boatman's village consisted only of a few houses, all crowded round a lock and a bridge. There was a boatman's bootmaker's, from the recesses of whose workshop came a most deafening

clinking of hammers closing rivets up, showing clearly the metallic character of the article produced. There was a boatman's tailor's and hosier's, with many pairs of the bright blue thick worsted stockings shining through the small window, and fustian trousers hanging up outside the door, dancing in the slight breeze. Women were leaning over garden-rails in little front-gardens on the towing-path, talking to boatmen; while other women in barges were coming out of cabin doorways to join in the conversation, followed by children, who appeared one after the other, as the first got out of the way of the second, and the second of the third, like the figures that come through an archway on the top of the automaton toy-clocks. One precocious young boatman, aged eight years, dressed in the most approved style, with jacket-waistcoat, trousers, and cap, was attending to a large horse, and superintending the progress of his father's barge through the lock-gates.

Inquiries were being made on land and water respecting journeys, families, relations, cargoes, provisions, and persons passed on the road; while Captain Randle emerged from the Stourport cabin, and asked two women standing at the door of the tailor's when he might expect the new plush waistcoat they had got in hand. Close to the lock-gates was a long low-roofed tavern, grocer's and butcher's, all in one, kept by a female relation of our com-

mander. We left the barge in a body along with the cheerful giant and two of the butty-boat crew, to try the strength and flavour of the tavern's best ale. We entered a long room, with a very low ceiling, old diamond-pained, leaden-framed windows, containing seats, an enormous kitchen-range, clean deal kitchen-tables, and a tall clock in a mahogany case like a small wardrobe. Through a door at the end was seen the grocery department, communicating with, and terminating in, the butcher's shop. This passage formed such a tempting vista of food that we could not delay a moment, and, leaving the boatmen to drink their ale, we rushed through, and immediately purchased several pounds of beefsteak. We returned to the Stourport, rich in the prospect of a good supper (without bacon and eggs), and were more contented than we had been for some hours.

We glided on through more valleys, lighted by a golden moon that shone brightly upon the slopes of yellow corn. Captain Randle took his place once more at the tiller, still in his shirt sleeves, and we observed an unusual glow upon his face, and a strange jaunty appearance about his cap. The straw-haired young man, in walking to the other end of the boat, along the tarpaulin's back-bone—a task, at any time, almost equal to tight-rope dancing—displayed a little more hesitation than usual, and a little less certainty of footing. It soon

became evident that the ale at the boatman's village tavern had caused Captain Randle and his son to feel an agreeable elevation of spirits—especially the captain.

"Take care, captain," I said; "take care, or you'll fall into the canal."

The captain did not immediately reply; but smiled gradually all over his face, closing one eye, half closing the other, and still swaying very loosely and easily to and fro.

"'Av' I made you coomfor'ble, Must' Oll'?"

"You have behaved to us," I said, "like a father." A remark in which Cuddy cordially joined.

"Bless you, William," returned the captain, "I'll do all I can fur you."

Captain Randle happened to direct his attention at this moment to the moon, which shone full in his face, making it glow like a large red apple. Some shadow of an old song, containing a scrap of classical learning, must have come across the poetical side of the captain's character at that moment; for he turned to me, jerking his head on one side, and pointing to the great luminary over his shoulder with a motion of his thumb, and said in a tone of quiet admiration: "Bright Phœbe—Must' Oll'!—bright Phœbe!"

After we had fully enjoyed this sudden and unexpected outburst of the captain's poetical fancy

or memory, Cuddy suggested the immediate preparation of supper; and expressed a wish that it should consist of steak and onions. This dish, coarse and vulgar as it sounds, is a secret favourite of all men, from peers to peasants, and derives an additional charm from the fact, that according to the settled rules of good society, it can only be indulged in in silent solitude; in inaccessible garrets, hermits' caves, or on the middle of Salisbury Plain.

No sooner was Cuddy's wish made known, than the captain resigned the tiller to his son, and plunged into the small cabin to prepare a meal. The elaborate process of cooking took a long time; but it came to an end at last, and we were gratified by Captain Randle's announcement that supper was ready, this time dished up in the cabin. We descended to find the small place lighted up with a bright, fierce, white-heat fire, that roared up the funnel. Like the devoted Shadrach and Abednego, we entered the fiery furnace. Captain Randle withdrew to take his place again at the tiller, and we sat down to indulge in our chosen meal. Cuddy sat upon the edge of the bed: I sat upon the cabin bench, within a foot of the savage glare of the stove. We had scarcely served out our respective portions, when Cuddy complained of a sense of fulness in his head, and I looked towards the small doorway, and saw it nearly closed up with Captain

Randle's short, fat legs. There was no taming the fire, the heat must have been above anything ever borne by puddlers at an iron-works, and I felt with Cuddy strong symptoms of approaching apoplexy. In less than another minute Shadrach and Abednego gave in, and rushed from the fiery furnace like a pair of frightened salamanders, through Captain Randle's legs into the grateful, open air, once more under the glimmer of the harvest moon. The remainder of our feast was handed to us upon the poop.

Soon after this we reached the gauging-house at Braunston, where the Grand Junction Canal begins; and we took leave of our butty-boat and the cheerful giant very cordially, their destination being along a branch to Stratford-on-Avon.

We glided on to the Warwickshire canals, and passed another night in dreamy contests with locks. In the morning we entered the highly fashionable town of Leamington, in our shirt-sleeves, performing a toilet, open to the observation of every gay lounger and taker of the waters. Luckily for us the hour was four in the morning, and the part of the town which we passed through might have been the commonest quarter of Hoxton, for any signs there were of the fashionable dwellings and the fashionable existence of this highly favourite English Spa. There was a row of small, shabby houses upon the canal bank; a policeman in the

London uniform, who looked at us for a few moments in speechless wonder, and then disappeared down a narrow street; a carrying depôt, where we rang up a man, swung out a large crane, tore open the tarpaulin, and landed a hogshead of sugar, which had harboured wasps, to our great annoyance, for the last two days. We then glided slowly and silently upon our journey.

On we went, round the distant outskirts of the old city of Warwick; past more parks; up more lock-staircases; along a tree-bordered level; under more old red-bricked bridges; within sight of ancient country-houses with old crumbling walls inlaid with timber, once perhaps palaces, but now descended to farms, under whose old pointed roofs William Shakespeare may have drunk and feasted; or over whose broad acres that unscrupulous dramatist may have shot game without a license; past black, smoke-grimed, town-stamped boys, angling in the canal; past groups of ill-favoured, smoking, half-drunken men-youths—a mixture of the factory-hand, the dog-fancier, and the fighting-man; within sight of high viaducts, over which fly the hard-breathing engines—and clattering trains which have passed and repassed us on each side a hundred times during our slow journey; past a coal-dust-looking towing path, and under a sky of smoke; past tall chimneys and dingy gas-works; down another staircase of black locks, opened by a

poor, active, grimy girl-child not more than ten years of age; past groups of demon-looking men who grin at us with white teeth, from coal-heaps, and the white, roaring mouths of furnaces; past backs of myriad-windowed factories, whose glass is broken, and under whose walls lie green, sickly pools of stagnant water; past a dozen grimy boys with large set jaws and shrunken arms, and legs, bathing amongst the floating dead dogs and factory scum of the inky canal; past all this and more, and we leave the romance and beauty of our three days' journey far, in idea, behind us, to glide to our final destination under the overhanging sheds of our Company's carrying wharf, in the very heart of the town of Birmingham.

Thus ended our canal journey. We shook hands with Captain Randle, the straw-haired young man, and the two able-bodied boatmen, and went our way, leaving our puzzled commander under the mystery of our unexplained presence, taking away much ourselves that will be to us as a dream in after years.

RIDING THE WHIRLWIND.

My railway carriage this night is not the padded saloon with the six chocolate-coloured cloth compartments, the blue and white binding, the wicker hat-rail, the cauldron-shaped oil-lamp (reminding us of the street-lights of our early childhood), the Scotch shawls, the Templar caps, the sandwich-boxes, the wine-flasks, the fur-rugs, the light literature, the latest newspaper, and the languid Corinthian first-class passengers. It is not that worn, dusty, drafty, bare wooden carriage, which in winter is an ice refrigerator, chilblain nourisher, and rheumatism cherisher, and which in summer is an oven of baked varnish, whose walls are decorated with that highest effort of advertising art—the picture of the man with the excruciating toothache, who would not use the ointment of the Druids, and who looks at you and your companions, the commercial travellers, piteously through the long hours of the night. It is not that large, roomy carriage, with the high wooden sides and the extremely narrow doorway, provided by the thoughtful care of a paternal parliament, at the rate of one penny per mile, in which the agricultural body is

conveyed from place to place, smelling very strongly of beer, of cheese, and onions, and from which the agricultural face smiles curiously at every station out of those small, high, barred windows, which remind one of the travelling caravan which contained the tigers, or a private lunatic asylum of very severe aspect. It is not that breezy, open truck, in which a group of rough, cheerful, vocal navvies are conveyed with pickaxes and shovels to and from the scene of their daily labours. It is not that large, red, saloon carriage, emblazoned with the national arms, in which busy men are always sorting letters, and sticking them into pigeon-holes, and making up and sealing leathern mail-bags. It is not that large condemned cell, or travelling warehouse-looking carriage, in which fat carpet-bags, hat-boxes, tin-cases, and corded packages are all huddled together in close companionship. My railway carriage to-night, which is a compound of the coal-cellar, the bakehouse oven, and the fiery dragon, is the conductor, the ruler, the guardian, and the leader of all these—it is the engine.

I have exchanged the comfortable warm interior of my first-class carriage—with the companionship of a German baron, looking out from the depths of a cavernous cloak, like a veritable Esquimaux, and an eminent French banker indulging in moody memories of the hateful sea—for a position on the edge of the coke-tender, sitting with one foot upon

the sand-box, and the other upon the handle of the coke-shovel—a position which no money could purchase, comfortless as it may seem, but for which I am indebted to my esteemed friend, Mr. Smiles, who, honourably known and distinguished in the ranks of literature himself, is always ready to serve a brother-labourer, without inquiring too curiously into the motives of his eccentric whims and fancies.

My companions are Tom Jones, of Wolverton, driver, and John Jones, of Lambeth, stoker; men not naturally taciturn—but whose occupation combining constant care, vigilance, and attention, with the fact that, on an engine in full motion, you cannot hear a voice above the roar of wind and steam, and the clatter of iron—have made them averse to conversation. The large clock at the station is at the time for starting—half-past eight P.M.—the carriage-doors are finally slammed to, a sudden silence pervades the place, the guard blows his shrill whistle, Tom Jones answers it with a responsive shriek from the engine, and we start, slowly and gently from London, with our mail express train for Dover. The lights are just being extinguished at that strange-looking Tooley Street Church—union of the ecclesiastical and the gas-works order of architecture—as we emerge from the iron shelter of the station into the outer wind and darkness. Not yet into the darkness, for in front of us is a brilliant galaxy of red, green, and white lights, looking like

a railway Vauxhall—a display of fireworks—an illumination—a fête in honour of our departure, or a large variegated orrery suspended in mid air. Further on, as we leave the disks and semaphores and outbuildings behind us, passing the tan-yards, and branching out on the network of rails into the country, about New Cross, we appear to chase a solitary coloured lamp with lightning speed, and my imagination pictures us running towards a surgery for a doctor, in a very energetic manner. I can allow my fancy full play in looking at these signs; but to steady, patient Tom Jones, the driver, they are as the leaves of a book in which he often reads a lesson of life and death to himself and his heavy responsible charge—signal lessons of danger, caution, and safety.

The roaring of the wind and the throbbing of the engine increase as our speed increases, until I—who am seated on the edge of the coke-tender, with my head above the screen which protects the driver and stoker—become buffeted and deafened, and find it difficult to keep my seat. The whole country lies under a thick veil of dark gray mist, and the black trees and hedges rush past, casting a momentary shade upon the vision. On either side the white telegraphic posts pass in rapid and regimental succession the whole way through the journey. The small frail stations seem to totter as they go by; and we greet them with an additional roar,

like a tiger howling for prey. When we rush through an arch we are covered for an instant with a circle of fire, and we leave behind us wreaths of light, white, curling smoke. I look forward, and I see a faint glimmer hovering round what my reason tells me must be the funnel of the engine, but what my imagination pictures as the real driver of the train, a stout, round-shouldered individual, with a short, thick neck, and a low-crowned, broad-brimmed hat, like the stage-coachman whom I remember in my youth. He sits up in front, as if upon a box, tooling with a quiet dignity worthy of a whip of the old school and the first water.

We dart across the country—between high banks through valleys of chalk and sand—past trees—past roadside houses lighted up with the fires of a November night—starting away from twinkling villages like a skittish horse, or rushing madly across the quiet street with a roar and a whirlwind. While I am watching and speculating, steady Tom Jones and his mate, the stoker, have never moved from their posts, looking through their two large glasses in the screen before them for the various signals. Before me is the shining brass, and steel, and iron of the engine, a tin teapot with a long narrow spout full of oil, a small bundle of cotton and wool, the stops and valves, a hand lamp with a red glass, and the partly opened doors of two glowing, ever-craving ovens—the bowels of our steed—whose fiery hunger

John Jones, the stoker, is constantly trying to satisfy with coke. When the doors of these ovens are open, it is useless to look at anything in front, for the eyes are blinded with the glare, and I, therefore, amuse myself by watching the chromatic effects of the light upon my garments as John Jones shovels in the coke from the tender behind me. My brown trousers turn green, and my reddish-brown tweed overcoat turns first a whitish drab, and by the time the ovens have become nearly choked up with fresh coke, it has changed again to a dark rifle green.

A shrill whistle is given, and we enter our first tunnel. The roar and clatter are louder than ever, and the round-shouldered, thick-necked driver in front sits in holy calm with a halo of steamy glory round his head. The light seems to fall in streams on each side from the top of the arch; and when we emerge with another whistle into the open air, the sky spreads out suddenly before us like a fan.

I cast a look back at our train and see a sheet of light stretching out on each side like a couple of wings, yellow as a field of ripened corn, and divided by black bars—the reflection of the spaces between the falling carriages—as regularly as the oars of a state barge. I fancy in that limekiln-shaped shadow which is thrown across the light, and which runs up the chalk cliff as we go through the deep cuttings, I trace the familiar outline of my friend the German baron, who is sleeping luxuriously in

his warm carriage; while the thin, uneven line that darkens the cliff on the other side must represent the form of the French banker, who is probably dreaming of the Crédit Mobilier, and forgetting, for a few moments, the memory of the hateful sea. I turn to look again at steady Tom Jones, the driver, and find him wiping the steam off his glass, and keeping his never-ceasing, vigilant look-out a-head. At all hours of the day and night he is ready to ride on the whirlwind and direct the storm; to cast into the shade the performances of the genii of Arabian fables, and career through the air at the rate of a mile a minute with tons of animate and inanimate matter, for the very humble reward of from forty to fifty shillings a-week. The unwavering faith of the public in Tom Jones is something more than wonderful. They do not know him—they do not require even to see his face; but the mother trusts him with her first-born, the children trust him with their father, the brother trusts him with his sister, the husband trusts him with his wife, and, what is perhaps a greater mark of confidence, trusts him with himself; and they all believe that while they sleep he will watch—that fog and rain and sleet will not blind him—that fatigue and exposure will never cause him to close his eyes—that frost and snow will not benumb his faculties—that desperation, excitement, or mental disease will never shake the steady concentration of his thoughts and senses—

and that where the swerving of a finger's breadth, or the carelessness of an instant, would send the whole precious freight to utter destruction, he will steer safely through all difficulties, and punctually deliver his charge at the appointed place at the appointed time. And the public confidence is worthily placed. As he stands there before me in the glare of the coke oven, or the flickering light of the station, in the middle of the night, carefully oiling the joints of his engine, he is the model of an honest, conscientious workman, dutiful, orderly, and regular. May his shadow never grow less, and his engine never grow rusty!

The increased force of the wind and freshness of the air denote an approach to the sea-coast, and in a few minutes we are before the coke ovens of Folkestone, which remind one more of South Staffordshire than of Kent. A run through the glowing tunnels, and round the cliffs, carries us safely into Dover, where we part company with the Esquimaux German baron, and where the French banker is given up unconditionally and shudderingly to his natural enemy the hateful sea. I wish Tom Jones and his mate good-night, and I sink for a few hours into numerical insignificance as Number Two Hundred and Four, or something equally high, at the Lord Warden Hotel, trying in vain to sleep, with the roaring wind, the hissing steam, and the clattering engine ringing in my ears.

Punctually at eight next morning, I again take up my position by the side of Tom Jones, on the engine of the London express. The morning is fine and clear for November, the sea is breaking quietly over the sand and stones upon the beach, and the sea-gulls are flapping their long wings, and circling round the funnel of our engine, which does not look so like a stage-coach driver of the old school as it did in the night-mist. The round shoulders stand revealed in the morning light, as the brass, beehive-shaped manhole; the broad-brimmed hat is nothing more than the overhanging scroll top of the engine chimney. We start out of the station, along the coast-curve, at a fair speed, and rush towards what appears at first sight to be two upright letter-box slips, cut at the base of the high, steep cliff, but which develop, as we draw nearer, into two narrow, pointed arches, like the entrance to some old monastery, or cathedral. They are surely too narrow to admit the round, broad shoulders, and the low-crowned hat, and yet we are rushing towards them, reckless of consequences! Tom Jones did not appear unsteady last night, but now he increases the steam when he ought—or at least I think he ought—to apply the brakes, and John Jones seems equally careless. I see before me the prospect of being jammed up in the centre of a chalk-cliff, and dug out at the end of a few centuries, a petrified mass, like those hares which

the newspapers tell us the woodman sometimes finds imbedded in the brave old oak, or the toad which the geologist discovers in one of the formations. It is useless for the cold mathematical fiction-crusher to cry "Fudge," and say that I knew very well we were making for an ordinary tunnel, traversed by some sixty trains a-day. Let him put himself in my position, on the tender of an engine, going at the rate of forty miles an hour, towards what appears to be a common rat-hole, at the foot of a hill, with certain strings issuing from its mouth, and he will find even his sluggish imagination stimulated. Destruction or safety, there is small time for reflection. In an instant we are at the portals of the cliff, which widen at our approach, and I involuntarily shrink as we plunge through them into the thick, black darkness.

The roar increases, and the hissing is as if our way lay through Pandemonium, and over the prostrate bodies of a thousand serpent fiends. There is not a glimmering of light now, it being day, except when the white steamy smoke is beaten down upon us from the roof. I, who look out a-head, can at last discern a very small open church-door, and through it I can see the faint gray-blue outlines of the country. The doorway appears to be rapidly advancing towards us, increasing in size, and the country becomes more distinct, looking like a bit of valley scenery, seen from some large old cathedral

aisle. I have scarcely time to admire the setting of the picture formed by the sharp, well-defined outline of the arch, when, with a whistle, we find ourselves out of the tunnel amongst the sea-gulls and the hills. I now enter into the excitement of the whirlwind coach, which dashes with me on the tops of high level mountains, passes over iron bridges that answer the never-ceasing rushing noise, with a responsive roar, rushes down again into a deep valley with the sandy hills almost closing overhead; past groups of white-shirted labourers, looking like a flock of sheep; past pastures, in which the quiet, grazing cattle, grown wise in their generation, allow us to rush by without displaying either fear or wonder.

We now make for another cliff at increased speed, guiding our course towards a small, round, black, target-mark at the base, about the size of a penny piece. As we draw nearer, it assumes the proportions and appearance of the entrance to a gas-pipe. Although I admit that our success was very great in going through the cathedral aisle, still I cannot help thinking that the round shoulders are rather too venturesome in trying the passage of such a circumscribed tunnel. But the railway architect delights in a close shave. He sends us round curves, and under bridges within a foot of the top and sides—perhaps a yard, but, as I look at it from my point of view, it seems about an inch.

He sends us past walls, past stations, past houses, in the same spirit of economizing space; and although, by a strong effort of the mind, we arrive at the conclusion that it is all mathematically correct, still it is very difficult to convince the unreasoning senses of the fact, especially from the outside of an express engine. We near the mouth of the tunnel, which opens like the jaws of a whale to receive us, and with a wild shriek of the steam whistle, we are again in utter darkness. I do not feel my hat battered in, and I therefore conclude that the round shoulders have received no injury. I can pardon the imagination for performing any freak, while the body is careering through such a place. Where are we? Where are we hurrying to? Are we in a main sewer, or a dark passage leading fathoms deep under the sea? Is that rushing, hissing sound the cry of the great waters as they pass us in headlong fury on either side, full of strange and novel life; full of prickly star-fish, and dull-eyed, large-mouthed fishy monsters; full of a wondrous network of animal vegetables, and vegetable animals; and do I, with a sense of suffocation, resign myself to the embraces of the clasping polypi? Should I be astonished at a merman asking for tickets? Certainly not; nor should I be astonished at seeing a lurid glare coming from half-opened iron doors across the darkness, and agonized, hard-featured, red-faced men, stand-

ing to give a grim welcome to the awful realms of ——.

I look out a-head, against the whirlwind, and in the far distance I see a small light yellow disk, the termination of the tunnel, which appears like a full moon resting on the waters. As we advance, the sides of the tunnel glisten with a faint light, and I appear to be flying through a gigantic telescope.

The scene changes again, and the yellow circle at the end becomes as the reflected disk of the large microscope at the Polytechnic. Two specks pass across the circle, like the insects in a drop of water; they are railway labourers crossing the mouth of the tunnel. The disk becomes larger, and the outlines of country are seen through the blue mist. They increase in distinctness, and the colours fill themselves in, one by one, until the whole stands revealed as a perfect landscape, into the midst of which we are suddenly shot, as if from the mouth of a cannon.

On we go, out of the sun-light into the mist, again out of the mist into the sun-light; past undulating parks, rich with the red-brown trees of autumn; past quiet pools and churches in among the hills; past solitary signal-men, and side-stations, where weary engines rest from their labours; past hurrying down-trains with a crash and a whirl; and at last, through arches, in amongst the crowd of trains, each making for the London terminus.

Then come the churches and chimneys, the line of docks and houses, the market-gardens, the tan-yards, and, on the line, the signal-houses, the coloured semaphore arms, extended like the variegated sails of a windmill; the men waving red and green flags, as if in honour of our approach; the other men, standing motionless, with projecting arms, like raw recruits under exercise, or a mesmeric patient in a state of catalepsy; the disks hanging like enormous pairs of spectacles across bare poles; the ringing of bells, the crowd of people, the final whistle of the engine, the grinding screech of the train, and our flying journey is completed.

CASTLES IN THE SEA.

It is many years ago—perhaps more than I care to name—since I first saw that amphibious, dripping, flopping performance at the Polytechnic Institution, which was intended to enlighten the visitors upon the manners and customs of divers and mermaids. I had the honour of being introduced to the principal performer. I remember the show-diver as well as if it was only yesterday: a middle-aged, moody man, who presented the appearance of a sulky actor heartily tired of his monotonous work, or a worn-out, jaded pedestrian, who had got about half-way through a thousand miles in a thousand successive hours. As he sat upon a short stool in a dark corner of the building, between the periods of his immersions, I felt that he was brooding over the uselessness of his life, and my young heart offered him its unsophisticated sympathy.

"How would you like to be pitted agen an electrical eel?" he asked.

"Not at all, sir," I answered.

"Very well, then," he returned, "that's what they're doing with me. They're advertising me agen that brute at the Adelaide Gallery."

"Indeed, sir," I said.

"I don't like it," he continued, "and I wish I could get out of it."

Many months after this I visited the same place again; and yet I found him sitting on his stool, as if he had never moved from the moment I had left him. I came this time with a party of youths from the academy where I was being educated, headed by our master, who taught us science amongst the "extras," and lectured us on certain days, in public places, like the Polytechnic, under some arrangement which he had made with the proprietors. I saw my friend the diver come forward in a curious, puffy dress, with his head done up in a goggle-eyed metal helmet, like a giant in the pantomime. When he rolled slowly and clumsily over the edge of the pond-basin into the water, like an unwieldy fish, there were many of the children who thought he was a bogie, and especially the boy who stood next to me, whom I tried to comfort by telling him that I knew the performer.

After the usual pennies had been thrown into the pond, and the diver had brought them up above the surface, and had tapped them on the top of his helmet, like an intelligent whale that had just learnt some juggling trick with coins, and was rather proud of it, our master took us aside, and began the lecture of the afternoon upon diving and diving-bells.

He told us how Aristotle had mentioned divers-

kettles, and Lord Bacon divers' bells, and how the first known use was made of them by two Greeks at Toledo, in 1538, before the court of Charles the Fifth and ten thousand persons. He told us how the first idea was taken from a drinking glass immersed in a basin, and how the diving-dress was no more wonderful than the diving-bell, being supplied in the same manner with air through a tube. He told us many other things of the same kind, which we took very little notice of at the time, being more interested in the wet swimming of the live diver than in any dry histories of the invention. We forgot them all long before the picture of the goggle-eyed, floating bogie in the pond had faded from our minds, and found them, when we grew older, in the Penny Cyclopædia.

I seized an opportunity, on this occasion, to slink away from my companions, behind the scenes (which, in this case, were garden pumps and electrical machines), and have a few moments' conversation with my friend the diver.

"Here you are agen, young 'un," he said, as soon as he saw me; "does it rain outside, as usual?"

"No, sir," I answered; "it's quite a fine day."

"Oh, is it?" he replied; "it's always wet with me, that's all I know."

"I dare say, sir," I answered.

"He's been pitchin' it into you pretty strong

about me, ain't he?" asked the diver, alluding to my schoolmaster's lecture.

"Yes," I said, "he told us when you were invented."

"Look here," he returned, bending towards me in a confidential manner, "I don't mind telling you; that greasy pond ain't the sea, mind that."

"Indeed, sir," I said.

"No," he continued; "I don't say any more. This here ain't divin', and that 'ere ain't the sea."

I was summoned away, with the other boys, immediately after this mysterious communication, and I kept my secret. The desire to see a real diver strengthened with years, to give place, at last, to a desire to go down in a real diving-bell. The last words of the sham-diver were always in my ears; the form of the show diving-box was always in my eye; my reading seemed to carry me among pearl-fisheries, ship-raising, engineering operations, and places where divers and diving were always mentioned, until, upon growing out of the bondage of youth and academies into the freedom of manhood and the world, I lived for no other purpose than to descend in a sea diving-bell.

I have a theory, founded on experience, that what a man has steadily set his mind upon doing, he is sure to do. He may have to wait some years before the opportunity arrives, but if his mind re-

main fixed in the same direction, that opportunity will assuredly come.

The theatre of my diving-bell experiment grew upon me by degrees: it was the Admiralty pier-works off Dover. It must have been ten or twelve years ago, when I saw the first signs of that work on the south coast, which has now resulted in a projecting pier-arm of firm masonry stretching half a mile towards France into the stormy Channel sea, and which in twenty years more, perhaps, will be finished as a breakwater and a harbour of refuge. Sometimes the workmen leave their chains, their scaffoldings, and their blocks of stone, on a calm summer's evening, to come back and find that a storm in the night has swept away many costly months of hard, patient labour.

It was at the farthest end of this half-mile roadway into the Channel (thanks to the kind exertions of my friend Mr. Smiles of the South Eastern Railway, Mr. Wey, the station-master at Dover, and Mr. Lee, the contractor), that I was allowed to make my first acquaintance with the bottom of the sea.

I arrived at the works one sultry afternoon in summer, and was conducted, at once, down a wet muddy lane of iron tramway, between what appeared to be solid blocks of masonry, raised on each side, like the walls of some fortification. These were square granite boxes, made to a certain

thickness of stone, and filled with a concrete mixture of sea-sand, pebbles, and lime. This composition, which takes several months to ripen or harden, is used from motives of economy, and when the boxes are fit for use, they are piled one upon another, and form the roadway into the sea. They are marked with a number, a date, and a price—the latter being three pounds sterling—which partly show the progress and cost of the work. Near the sea end of this lane, standing upon one side, under the heavy overhanging scaffolding, and between the concrete blocks, was a small wooden hut, not unlike a fisherman's hut in shape, but presenting the appearance of a rude early store in Australia for the sale of boots, coats, and Guernsey shirts. A large old cracked lantern was among the apparent stock in trade; but seven-league boots, such as are worn by men who go down the sewers, formed the staple. Most of these boots were hanging up against the wall of the hut, like specimens of some well-greased black and unknown beast; the great nails in the heavy sole grinning like a hundred teeth. One pair were lying in a bandy-legged posture on a heap of rubbish at the door of the hut, looking like the limbs of a fierce horse-soldier, whose body had been blown away in battle.

This was the haunt of the mermen stonemasons, where the dry clothes of earth were exchanged for

the soddened, pickled, salt-stiffened, clothes of the sea; and here I, as an amateur merman, was disguised, so that I might have deceived my own mother as to my identity.

It appeared that I had undertaken to do something which, if not very desperate, was very rare. No "amateur," as I was called, had ever been down in a bell during the whole twelve years the works had been in progress. Princes of the blood, I was told, had exhibited a desire to see something of the lower merman-life, and had been courteously but firmly refused. I thought that princes of as little blood as possible were the best persons to descend in diving-bells, because of the determination of that vital fluid to the head. Any way, the hour's dip to the bottom of the sea that I had asked Mr. Lee, the contractor, to give orders for me to receive, was a luxury, apart from its rarity, that would add ten pounds to the cost of the pier.

I put on a blue Jersey fisherman's shirt, a pair of long, dark, rough, gray leg-bags—I cannot call them stockings—which made me look as if I were made up at that extreme to perform the part of a man-monkey; and after this I drew on a pair of loose brown frieze trousers. At this point I felt very apoplectic and puffy, and experienced a difficulty in stooping, which compelled me to call for assistance in getting into my waterproof seven-league boots. When this defensive toilet, this

human fortification, was completed with a water-proof sou'-wester cap, I stood up a perfect merman, allowing for the dash of the amateur which I have before alluded to. My attempts at walking were heavy, dignified, and slow. There was no springiness, no dancing-master elasticity, about me. My frail, but once active body, was like a mummy encased in many solid folds; and at every step I took I felt a resisting weight, as if I were walking through a thick bog.

A few paces out of the hut, and up the lane towards the sea, and I found myself among my fellow-mermen. Some were trudging towards the shore, having finished their day's work, while others were sitting on the sea-washed stone steps, which formed the termination of the pier-work, as far as it had reached, waiting for the rising of the bell which was to take them down below. They were all dressed very nearly in the same style as myself, except that my clothes had the proper amateur quality of being perfectly new.

Beyond this wet, slimy, iron-bound pyramid of steps, stretching some little distance further into the sea, was a heavy and solid scaffolding, reaching far above our heads, and supported upon strong piles more than one-half in the water, and with the other part out.

These piles, which cost about fifty pounds each, and which are often washed away in a storm, like

straws, are strongly shod with iron. The part of them which appears immediately above the water is hung with rich brown sea-weed, tipped with a deep border of green moss above. Standing upon some of the stone blocks which have already begun to peep above the surface of the water within this framework, were several of my fellow-mermen, who looked like Arctic voyagers among the ice.

At last my diving-bell (which was one of six on the works, four employed and two unemployed) pushed its slightly convexed iron head above the waves, as it was drawn up by several firm chains, that were worked by windlass carriages on the scaffolding above. Slowly it rose, like a square, rusty iron column, being dragged, like a tooth, out of the sea, until its lower edge broke away from its suction of the water, and it looked nothing but a huge, dripping weight. When it had reached some three feet above the surface, a boat rowed underneath it, and then a seven-league boot, followed by another seven-league boot, and again by two more seven-league boots, dropped slowly into the boat: looking, in connection with the body of the diving-bell from which they came, like the legs of a tortoise, which that animal sometimes condescends to put out. The illusion was instantly destroyed by seeing the two mermen, who had been at work in the bell, following their legs, and dropping into the boat, to be rowed towards the wet and slimy pyramid of steps.

They had been down for the second five hours' period of their two daily dips (their day's work under water being about ten hours), and they looked muddy, wet, heavy, and tired, and flushed in the face with a reddish-olive brown. They go to work in couples at daybreak, and their wages are a little higher than they would get on land, being about one hundred pounds a-year.

The diving-bells that are used at these works seem to be the ordinary engineering bells, or boxes, first employed by Mr. Smeaton in repairing the foundations of Hexham Bridge in 1779, and afterwards in 1788, when he was engaged in constructing Ramsgate Harbour. The air, in this instance, is pumped down a conger-eel-looking tube from the scaffolding above; another tube runs up to the same machine, containing an endless chain, by which anything can be drawn into the bell while it is under water; another tube is placed in the same position, through which the diver below can signal to those above to shift the bell from place to place; finally, the whole structure is suspended by strong chains fastened to nutted rings in the top of the bell. The tubes are elastic, and prevented from closing by a metal framework which runs up the inside.

I dropped clumsily down the pyramid of steps towards my boat, putting my heavy boots in the water that dashed over the stone, and my hands in

slimy, blanched sea-weed, that had clung to the masonry, and looked like maccaroni. In stormy weather I was told the mermen are sometimes washed off these steps; but as I descended in what was considered fine weather, I was merely washed on them.

A few minutes, with a few bounding pulls of the mermen's special waterman, and I found myself under the dripping dome of my allotted diving-bell. Seizing a large iron ring which hung from the roof of the bell, I drew myself up into the chamber, placed my feet upon a muddy narrow board that went across from side to side, and rested upon two small ledges, and seated myself upon another board, similarly supported, that went across one end of the bell, like a seat in a four-wheeled cab. My companion merman—a regular diver, who had directed my movements—followed me, and placed himself on the opposite side. The boat glided away, and we were left suspended over the water.

Our apartment had something of the bathing-machine about it; something of the condemned cell in Newgate; something of the coal-mine; and something of Robinson Crusoe's hut. It was about four feet and a-half high, four feet broad, and six feet long. Its walls were of cast-iron, about three inches thick, and its roof was slightly concave from the interior, containing six thick circular bull's-eye windows, about the size of tea-saucers, which, being

covered outside with four crossed and recrossed bars of thin iron as a protection from falling stones, presented the appearance of open-worked tartlets. On one side of the bell were hanging a heavy pick-axe, a thick shovel, a crowbar, a hammer, a billhook —all of solid make—and a bundle of dirty tow that looked like a doll. On the other side-wall of the bell was a short length of iron sausage-work, reminding me very forcibly of Jack Sheppard in the strongest cell of Newgate, Baron Trenck in prison, or the lowest dungeon of the castle keep. This chain, for chain it was, was carried to be attached to a strong nutted ring in the roof of the bell, dropping into the water with a hook at its other end; which hook, when fastened to the ring at the top of every stone block that had been lowered by machinery to the bottom of the sea, would raise or move the stone by the simple raising or moving of the bell. This, in substance, was all the heavy work that was performed with the diving-bell machinery; the divers going down to attach and detach the chains—to place the blocks by directing the motions of the bell through signals given to the men above—and to dig out and level the foundations amongst the sea-anemones at the base.

We are let down, almost imperceptibly, by two men at the windlass machinery. As two fundamental principles in the management of diving-bells are, that they shall descend so that the four

sides of their lower edge may touch the water on a level and simultaneously, and that the downward journey through the water shall be gradual and slow, any rapid paying-out of the lowering chains would be instant death to those in the bell, by filling it with water. This accident is provided against by a checking "crab," of complicated structure, but of simple, self-acting operation, which, the moment it is required, immediately comes into use.

By degrees, the square patch of thick milky fluid beneath our feet appears to rise towards us, and we are made aware of the bell having bitten the sea by a flopping, sucking noise, and the swelling up of the water to the narrow plank across the centre, near the bottom, on which we rest our seven-league boots. At this moment I become conscious of the measured beat of the watchful air-forcing pump, which sounds like the bumping of a heavy footstep in a moderate-sized house, two floors overhead; it is followed by a gentle snorting, like the respirations of a horse, the struggle of the air through the valve at the bottom of the conger-eel-looking tube. This valve is in the centre of the roof of the diving-bell, and cannot be interfered with by the men in the cell. If the bumping of the pump ceases, or the snorting is no longer heard, it is the duty of the diver to pull the raising signal, as the supply of life is no longer coming in,

and five or six minutes may exhaust the existing stock of air.

Our destination is sixty feet below the surface, or twice the depth of the street seen from the top of an ordinary house; and very slowly we proceed to reach it. The thick water below us is now stationary, and we have no guide by which to measure our progress except the different gradations of light. I am first made aware of the whole bell being under water by having my attention drawn by my fellow-merman, who wears a cap, and looks like Robinson Crusoe, to a few pinches of sand that are washed about on the top of the bull's-eye windows. There is a calm silence, only broken by the flapping of a chain against the outside of the bell; the glittering sunlight, toned down as it has been by the thick glass, immediately changes to a bright green twilight; and the water casts off its milky thickness, and looks like green lamp-oil. This green colour was caused by the yellow sand still mixing with the blue water, as we were not far enough out from the land to get into the deep blue sea. At this moment I felt a sharp pain shooting through my head, which, scientifically speaking, was caused by the pressure of the condensed air in the bell, but which, popularly explained, to use the words of an old writer on the subject, was like having a couple of sharp quills thrust forcibly into each ear.

"Rinse 'em out with a little sea-water," said Robinson Crusoe, who sat opposite to me, and whose face became more swarthy every foot we sank; "it did me good when I first went down, some two year ago."

I followed Robinson Crusoe's advice, paddled in the water between my legs, and poked my wet forefingers into my ears; but I cannot recommend the remedy as a perfect cure.

As we got a few feet lower (we sank about two feet a minute) the twilight deepened, and looking upward through the green bull's-eyes into the sea above us, it reminded me of watching a large space through a very small window that was covered with an impenetrable fog. Robinson Crusoe now began to provide for contingencies, by hauling in a candle with the endless chain. When it came at last through the water at the bottom of the bell—a messenger of light from above—it was a small composite dip, that did not seem much injured by its passage down the tube.

A few feet deeper, and the water became clearer—more like glass, and less like green lamp-oil—while the pain in my ears went off to a great extent, as Robinson had predicted it would. The twilight in the bell-chamber deepened, and the water beneath us became even more clear, until we at length sighted our promised land—the bottom of the sea. The water being calm, we had no occasion

to light our candle (a light being a very common necessity), and we saw the lumps of chalk and flint lying side by side, like atoms that were magnified in a large microscope. The sea was as clear as some spirit thrice refined, and it swayed to and fro over its stony bed, like a pond of liquid quicksilver.

Another foot lower, and we slipped off our muddy seats, to stand fairly at the bottom of the sea.

Here Robinson very kindly went through a variety of performances, with the view of enlightening me as to the manners and customs of mermen-stonemasons while at work in building under the sea. He took the loose plank upon which I had been sitting, and placed it against the other plank upon which he had been sitting, in a horizontal, but upright position; he then reached a couple of wedges from a small ledge at the side, with which he made this structure firm, until it was turned into a perfect trough. He then took the pickaxe, and dug out a few stones at the bottom of the sea, which he shovelled into this trough, and then we stood upon the lower centre plank, while he gave the sign to those above to move us.

"Now," he said, pulling the signal handle, which was like a syringe handle, a preconcerted number of times, "we'll go over the mud-box."

In a few seconds, with a slight roar as we left the bottom, we found ourselves rising slowly, like a very heavy balloon. The chalk and flint, after shaking about in the liquid glassy microscope for some little time, grew, by degrees, more misty, and, at last, disappeared.

"Now," said Robinson, giving another pre-concerted number of pulls at the signal handle, "we'll hold hard;" and in a few seconds the bell was motionless.

"Now," said Robinson, acting as before, except with regard to the number of pulls, "we'll go to France;" and in a few seconds more, we were moving in a forward direction, away from the English coast. A few paces brought us to the spot where Crusoe knew the mud-box to be, and another series of pulls caused the bell to stop, and assume a downward direction. Casting my eyes in the water, I soon saw the dim outlines of an oblong shape, which gradually developed into a long open iron coffin, with heavy chains stretched tightly across its surface, and secured in the middle with a large iron ring. A few more seconds of descent, during which this chest of water seemed to rise slowly towards us, and I found that it was full of flint and chalk. The trough in our bell was soon knocked to pieces, by taking out the side wedges, and the rubbish which it contained was swept down into the mud-box beneath. This box, when full, is attached

to chains communicating with the machinery above, and is hauled up to any position that the work may require. As a rule, it is drawn up full on the Ramsgate side of the pier, and emptied on the Folkestone side, as a protective embankment against the constant and partial washing of the sea.

These operations, with the block-raising and block-placing before alluded to, constitute the chief work of Robinson Crusoe and all his mermen mates. Occasionally, to save time, excursions are made, with the protection of the diving helmet, under the edge of the bell, out into the deep sea. The air is then supplied to the labourer under water, from the chamber of the bell, by means of a tube; and he looks, as he walks upon the flinty, uneven pathway, in heavily weighted clogs, to keep him steady and to keep him down, like some curious half-human monster, employed in smoking a gigantic hookah, the bowl of which is the bell, and the pipe of which is the elastic communicating tube. "This here is divin'," as my old friend at the Polytechnic would have said, "and this is the sea."

Robinson, having put the bell through all the paces of which it is capable, lifting and dropping, backwards and forwards, and right and left, at last gives the signal—according to my desire—that we shall be raised once more to the upper world; and five men, as I am informed, now work the

windlass which took two men to let us safely down.*

We rise, even more slowly and imperceptibly than we descended, because of the pressing weight of water above our heads; the light gradually changes from the black twilight of the bottom, through the green fog of the centre, up to the yellow sunlight higher still. The water over the bull's-eye windows becomes thinner and thinner, until it dashes backwards and forwards, like molten silver. The face of Robinson (who still sits opposite to me, the mud trough having been broken up and once more distributed as the two end seats) participates in all the changes of light, until it passes from a dark shadow to a bright, open, copper tea-kettle countenance. A thin white mist, or steam, has floated between us all through the upward journey, which the learned tell us, somewhat obscurely, is generated by the water having overcome some portion of the air, in consequence of a slight tilting of the bell while we were at the bottom. No practical merman, or landman, can give any common-sense explanation of the mysterious vapour.

The water got thicker and thicker as we drew near the surface, until it assumed the appearance of a thin white paint; and all the way up my ears were

* The writer has not only to thank these men, but the superintendents of the works, for their courtesy and attention on the occasion of his visit.

musical with a cracking, buzzing noise, as if a couple of bees had taken possession of my brain, and were striving to converse with each other across the passages.

At last I saw the silvery water fall off from the bull's-eyes, and in a few minutes our wet glistening iron chamber released its hold upon the sea. The fresh air rushed upward, tingling in my head, like a sniff of smelling salts; the boat came under us once more, containing another merman to take my place, provided with a tin bottle of tea (the chief refreshment the divers are allowed to carry down), and after wishing Robinson good day, I went on shore amongst a gang of mermen, who were still sitting patiently on the pyramid of dripping steps, awaiting the arrival of the slow and heavy carriages that were to take them to their building at the bottom of the ocean.

THE HAPPY FISHING-GROUNDS.

THERE has always been a charm to me about the fisherman's trade; a picturesque aspect, not only in those red-handed, heavy-booted, half-sailor-like dwellers upon the stony coast, who go slowly out in short, fat, bounding boats, to cast their brown wiry nets into the sea, but a rude poetry even about the sloppy fish-market of Lower Thames Street, with the steep and narrow City lanes that lead down to the loaded hoys, and end in a tangled web of rigging, masts, and cranes. Some portion of this bloom is thrown, to my fancy, over the old salt, small-windowed, yellow City oyster-shop; and it always seems to me that I have only to listen against the wall of such a place and hear the hissing of the sea, or to take up the floor of the little, dry, fishy counting-house, and find the blue waves rolling and beating at my feet. The solid surroundings of such a storehouse melt silently away, and shadowy ancient mariners pass in and out. The din of the busy street is suddenly hushed, and I hear nothing but the roaring of the wind. The low black rafters, hung with striding forms of bat-like fish, press down on me no more, and nothing but the

gray sky, or the blood-red sunset, is over my head. I see the dwarfed fishing-village across the waves; the cobwebbed lane of drying nets that winds down to the sands; and the soddened lobster-catchers struggling between the sunken rocks. I hear the mellow tolling of the church bells in the little turret that peeps over the huts. I see even further, to a small harbour on the Normandy coast, where a high-capped fisherman's wife is helping her sons and her husband as they drag out their battered boat. She watches them leave the shelter of the little breakwater, and plunge into the open sea; she looks anxiously at the black mountain of cloud that stretches, like a menacing angel, over the distant town; at the blinding columns of sand that come whirling along the old winding pier; and she drops in silent prayer before a weather-beaten crucifix that is raised upon a mound at the roadside.

With such day-dream visions as these, even in an old City oyster-shop, it is not to be wondered at that I have a passion, in all weathers, for dropping quietly down to the coast, and burying myself for a time in one of those hilly nooks where none but boatmen and fishermen can be born, can live, and can die. The places that I love most are those where the "season visitor" is almost, if not totally, unknown; where bathing-machines have never yet penetrated; where the stranger is truly a being of another world; and where the inhabitants believe,

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with a proud and simple faith, in the unequalled beauty and importance of their little scaly town. Many such places as these do I know, even within fifty miles of the Royal Exchange; and Whitstable, in Kent, the port of Canterbury, on the estuary of the Thames, is one of my especial favourites.

Many important towns, in many parts of England, exist upon one idea; and Whitstable, though not very important, is amongst the number. Its one idea is oysters. It is a town that may be called small, that may be considered well-to-do, that is thoroughly independent, and that dabbles a little in coals, because it has got a small muddy harbour, and a single line of railway through the woods to Canterbury, but its best thoughts are devoted to oysters. Its aspect is not sightly, if looked at with an eye that delights in the stuccoed terraces and trim gravelled walks of a regular watering-place; for the line of its flat coast (which takes up one side of a bay formed by the Swale, a branch of the Medway) is occupied by squat wooden houses, made soot-black with pitch, the dwellers in which are sturdy freeholders, incorporated free-fishers, or oyster-dredgers, joined together by the ties of a common birthplace, by blood, by marriage, capital, and trade. It has always been their pride, from time out of mind, to live in these dwarfed huts on this stony beach, watching the happy fishing-grounds that lie under the

brackish water in the bay, where millions of oysters are always breeding with marvellous fertility, and all for the incorporated company's good. How can the free-dredgers, and the whole town of Whitstable, help thinking of oysters, when so many oysters seem to be always thinking of them?

A primitive and curious joint-stock company it is; a joint-stock company whose shares are unknown upon the Stock Exchange, because they are never in any market except Billingsgate market; a joint-stock company that may not be peculiar to Whitstable, but is peculiar, so it seems, to all happy fishing-grounds, where oysters are cultivated, and the capricious bounty of seafaring Nature is reduced to a mathematical certainty by the application of capital and laborious care. It was not formed by any active and calculating company-maker, whose office is in the city of London, whose profit is a percentage upon all capital raised, and whose ambition is a secretarial chair. It came together, in the dim old times, as a family compact, and a family compact it still remains. Its three hundred and forty odd members are all Whitstable men, or Whitstable widows and children. The stranger is never admitted to the rights and profits of a dredging-freeman, though the strange woman may be brought, by marriage, into the oyster-tents, and may rear up sons who shall go forth and fish. The male infant is born, a young shareholder, in one of the low,

pitch-black wooden houses on the beach; he is nursed to the tune of an oyster-dredging lullaby, to the howling of the wind, to the hissing of the surge. He staggers into the back parlour as soon as he can walk, and finds it a Robinson Crusoe's storeroom, filled with canvas, coils of rope, old oars, nails, paint-pots, and parts of ships. He tumbles out of a door at the end, and down some steps, on to the pebbly shore, where he plays on the border of his happy fishing-ground, or clambers into a boat bearing his father's name, which lies high up on the beach, half filled with the skins of dead star-fish, with cockle-shells, and muddy crabs. As he grows older, he sees nothing to wonder at if a wooden staircase comes down from the top rooms of his father's house at the exterior of the side wall; and he thinks an old figure-head of Minerva, swept ashore, perhaps, from the wreck of some collier, an ornament for a parapet, superior to any statue that was ever hewn out of stone. His first budding geographical idea is that Billingsgate is the chief city of the world; as that is the only part of the great metropolis which comes into immediate and constant contact with his native town. He thinks that the handkerchief which his sister wears over her head and shoulders in summer, like a monk's cowl, or the shawl which she wears, for greater warmth, in the same way, in winter, the most elegant head-dress that was ever planned. The fact

that Canterbury, a cathedral city, about seven miles off, has never adopted this head-dress, is nothing to him, for he knows that Whitstable men are perfect in matters of fish, and he gallantly considers that Whitstable women must consequently be perfect in matters of taste. He looks upon a crowd of fifty blue woollen-shirted, heavy-booted, oilskin-capped free-dredgers, standing in the Whitstable High Street (the one main street of the town), as something which a place called Cheapside has never matched for noise and bustle, even on its most busy days. He is aware that the South-Eastern Railway has long since joined his native town to London, and that the North Kent Railway, with its continuations, has also advanced to within a single stage.* As the produce, however, of his happy fishing-ground is never landed at all, being shipped in his old, round, soppy market-hoys that are anchored in the bay, and conveyed to market direct by water (the cheapest way), he is not brought much in communication with the iron road, and he leaves it to the harbour traffic in coals and stone.

The free-dredger is thoroughly independent, not given to touch his hat to lord or squire; and if he does pay any mark of respect to the Duke of Cumberland, it is only as the sign of the dredgers' public-house, where the profits of the free company of oyster-fishers are divided and paid. At fourteen

* October, 1859.

years of age he may look with hope towards this old smoky tavern, and may enter as a fisherman's apprentice, to see his master paid; but at twenty-one he comes into his full birthright, his share in the myriads of oysters he has so long been thinking about, with all the claims and privileges that belong to the free-fishing state. He is then permitted to attend the "Water-Court" on the second Thursday in July. Here all the dredgers meet and vote by ballot, revise the by-laws, appoint the nine watchmen with three watching boats, the foreman of the ground, with his deputy, and twelve jurymen are chosen as the board of management for the year.

On this great day the whole town of Whitstable is hung with flags; and the sound of festivity is heard in the two principal taverns, and in the many small wooden drink-shops that are scattered along the shore. The inhabitants, who have long brooded over the oyster in the privacy of their homes, come forward now, and sacrifice publicly in its honour and praise. The young freemen are led into flirtations with maidens who are outside the incorporated dredgers' exclusive pale, and young brides are soon brought into the huts of the faithful, to gladden the hearts of the old freemen with the prospect of the company being preserved from decay. If a free-dredger dies without male issue, then his share becomes engulphed in the common stock; but his widow receives a certain reduced payment out of

each day's fishing profits, up to the time of her death. The aged, infirm, and superannuated, about one-fifth, are provided for in the same way, as well as those who are compelled, by temporary illness, to stop on shore. No one that has once been connected with the happy fishing-grounds is ever found begging for a loaf of bread.

The industrious little fleet consists of about eighty fishing-smacks, and fourteen market-hoys. The hoys are, of course, occupied in going to and coming from Billingsgate, but the fishing-boats are always moored in the bay, opposite the free-dredging settlement of the town. During three days of the week these floating representatives of the happy fishers (each one named after its chief master, or the head of the family to which it belongs) are employed with the happy fishers themselves in what is called "dredging for planting," and the general cultivation of the ground. Young oysters are caught and transferred to places where they will find the most nourishment; samples are drawn up, like wine out of a cask, inspected, specimens tasted, and the remainder returned to the sea. The natural enemies of the oyster are sifted out and destroyed—especially the poisonous star-fish and the mysterious "borer." The former must be the old original regular oyster-eater, as it devours them without pepper, vinegar, bread-and-butter, or brown stout; while the latter—a creature like a periwinkle—stabs

them to the heart, and leaves no sign but a few black specks upon the shell. The whole of this planting process is agricultural in its character; and it occupies about six hours on each of the three days. So important is it to the welfare of the happy fishing-ground, and so necessary is it not only to preserve the young oysters already distributed, but to import fresh life into the plantation, that last year (in 1858) the sum of fifteen thousand pounds was invested by the free company in a young oyster-brood purchased from the coast of Essex.

The dredging for the London market, a task of about two hours' duration, is performed on the other three days of the week—generally on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. It is regulated by the two salesmen who represent that happy fishing-ground in the market of Lower Thames Street, and it is this regulation which prevents any violent fluctuations of price. The telegram received from these agents directs the number of bushels that are to be caught for market on each fishing-day, and the catching of these bushels is work that is equally divided amongst all the effective members of the little oyster-fleet. Each crew of three men goes off to its particular boat to dredge its particular "stint" (the number it is to catch), and it is not allowed to draw up more than its allotted portion.

The first step in oyster-dredging is to put on an armour of warm clothing, in which it is extremely

difficult for a novice to move or breathe. There are long worsted stockings to be drawn on over the trouser-legs; a pair of long, heavy, sewer-boots, reaching almost to the waist, to be forced on over these, a thick Guernsey shirt to be stretched over your body-coat, and an oilskin sou'-wester hat (like a dustman's) to be placed on your head. It is not easy to put on a Guernsey shirt without some care and practice, as the material is so highly elastic, that the arms are contracted to about the size of gun-bags, and the head-hole is like the mouth of a stone-bottle. As the whole fabric is struggled into from the bottom upwards, there is a short period when you are enveloped in total darkness, when you feel your mouth full of wool, the grip of some tight though soft binding substance across your nose, and a strong sense of the impossibility of getting your head out through the chimney-pot above. When you emerge once more into the daylight, you feel flushed and rumpled, and you know that it requires some physical force to pull down the blue strait-jacket-like wrapper as far as your waist. In case of dirty weather, which is always provided for, you have a black, or yellow, salt, clammy oilskin overcoat thrown into your arms, which feels like the soddened skinny casing of some large fish.

About eight o'clock on a fresh October morning, the united company of free, happy-family oyster-fishers, plunge heavily and slowly through the stones

on the beach, and proceed, in a thoughtful and deliberate manner, to push off their boats, and row out to their little oyster-fleet. They are all equal; they are all working together for good. The father meets his son, who is apprenticed out of the domestic circle—perhaps to a brother fisher next door but two; the nephew meets his uncle, the uncle meets his cousin, the cousin inquires after his aunt, who is laid up with the lumbago; the grandson lends a helping hand to his grandfather; the brother-in-law is in attendance upon his relations by marriage, and the whole scene is a picture of quiet, profitable, patriarchal trade. A dozen happy-family shareholders will join to shoulder a rope, and pull off a barge-like boat that the tide has left high and dry. So confidentially do they lay their heads together to do this, that they look like a little open air board-meeting held on the beach. Their whole movements seem to be regulated by a strong feeling that they have many centuries before them in which to do their work; and whatever accusation may be brought against them, there is no man who can say that he ever saw them in a hurry. They have lived amongst oysters, and thought of them so long, till, at last, it is possible to trace something of that steady, stationary shell-fish in their nature. They have fallen upon favourable ground, where they fatten and thrive; and they show no disposition to wander or move.

The ship to which we now row off is a small yacht-like smack, of about fifteen tons burden. Its deck is almost flush with the bulwarks, and covered with baskets, buckets, and nets; its aspect is brown and yellow; and its flavour is as decidedly salt and fishy as that of a free-dredging oyster smack ought to be. When our gray sails are set we skim away from our inner coast moorings, through the little busy fleet, which, under all canvas, is already at work within the pole-marked bounds of the happy growing-ground, until we come to our proper anchorage, as settled by the foreman, the deputy, and the jury-board. The bright green hills of Kent, and the island of Sheppey, half encircle us; the blue salt water comes rolling in from the North Sea at the mouth of the bay; the thin, pale, fleecy, gray, and golden clouds are flying over our heads; and the dull sound of boat-building hammers comes to us from the low black town.

Our nets are like fish—a thick trellis-work of undressed buffalo hide, washed almost white with repeated dipping; and the iron knife-like bar at the mouth is formed so as to scrape the oyster-beds. They are dropped, with their iron work, like small anchors; and, when they are hauled in, there are shelly heaps in each net, numbering about eight hundred oysters. The haul is emptied on to the soppy deck, the nets are again cast over, and the happy dredgers stoop down in their tight, thick

costume, with very red faces and red hands, to begin the labour of sorting.

A few whelks have come up in the haul; a few strips of green, glistening seaweed; a few cockle-shells, one of which contains some little animal, unknown to me, whose kicking claws are hanging out, as it seems struggling to crawl in out of the cold; a few snuff-coloured old oyster-shells, eaten through till they are like rusty rings; and a few muddy spider-crabs, who run quickly from between the crevices of the little shelly hill. The oysters are of all sizes, in their different stages of growth. Some are like blocks of flint, a mass that, perhaps, numbers thirty nearly mature oyster lives. Some shells are covered with little pearly counters, the size of shillings, which represent a brood of infant oysters, all less than a year old. Some shells are ornamented with red-looking pimples, which the happy free-dredgers call "quats." Some oysters come up highly clean and perfect in their formation, but not much larger than half-a-crown. These are generally the two-year-olds, and, with all the preceding varieties, they are pushed on one side by the dredger, while he picks out only the sightly fish of four years' growth, and casts them into his basket. His theory is that the oyster, if left alone, may live about ten years; and that it is extremely good eating at five years of age. He knows the five-year-old oyster by the layers outside the bottom shell.

The little perfect yellow circle at the small end of the fan represents one year; the three successive brown pearly semicircles represent three other years, and the rough fringe round the outer edge represents the one year more. He is satisfied with the four-year-old oyster for general eating, and what he considers good the London market is compelled to take. His belief about the origin of the oyster is that the spawn, or "spat," as it is termed, will float, in the season of June and July (in this climate), upon the surface of the water until the sun has dried it into lumps. When these lumps reach a weight sufficient to sink, they fall to the bottom of the sea, where they find a bed which produces the nourishment they want. This is his natural history, and it is good enough for all practical ends.

When the sorting of the oysters is finished, and the baskets, which serve as measures, are filled with the picked fish, the refuse is swept back into the sea through trap-holes in the bulwarks. This latter process gives rise to reflections on the advantages of ugliness. It shows that an old oyster, with a repulsive exterior, may be pulled up many times in a general haul, but with the certainty that it will be returned to the water, to live there till it dies.

The loaded baskets, after being dipped in the bay, for the purpose of giving the oysters a slight wash, are placed on one side, and the same work is gone through again, until the "stint" (or allotted

number) is caught. The vessel shifts its moorings once or twice in the course of a single morning's dredge, in order that the hauls may be mixed, and that the taste of the metropolitan oyster-eater may not be spoiled by feeding upon one quality, and that quality, perhaps, the best. When the proper number of baskets are filled, they are placed in the boat belonging to the smack, and rowed to one of the market-hoys that are anchored amongst the fleet. Each one of these hoys is capable of receiving about one hundred bushels, or nearly one hundred and sixty thousand oysters; and fourteen of these vessels, as before stated, are constantly employed going to and fro in the Whitstable happy fishers carrying trade. The baskets are lifted out of the boat into the hands of the hoy-sailors—a very fishy, patched, and soppy crew—and their separate hundred-weights of contents are tilted, like coals, into the long wet hold. A soddened inspector, who looks like a hoy-captain, is kneeling on the deck, and watching through a pair of spectacles the descent of the quantity and quality at the same time. When the last smack has delivered its required load, the market-hoys turn their heads due Billingsgate; the fishing-vessels are mopped up, are run to their coast moorings, and made tight for the night; and the happy fishers go on shore to dinner, the masters of their own time for the remainder of the day. Towards night they assemble at the "Duke of

Cumberland," to hear and participate in the result of the last sale. The money is sent down by the two market salesmen in London, through the town agent of a Canterbury bank, and the sum is drawn out and divided by the managing jury of twelve. Their gains may fluctuate, being dependent upon profits, but it is generally found that if they want a pound on account, they know exactly where they can get it.

Without wishing to pry into free-dredging trade secrets, and overhaul the company's account-books, it is easy to see that they are not very hardly dealt with by nature and the metropolitan appetite, from certain signs that are not easily concealed. The joyous songs that come from the free-dredgers' chief tavern up to a late hour of the night, are not the sounds usually made by men who linger over an unsatisfactory pay-table.

ANOTHER WHITSTABLE TRADE.

If it had not fallen to the lot of Whitstable to be celebrated for its oysters, and its company of "free-dredgers," it might have claimed a word of notice for producing that rarest of all workmen, the sea-diver. As the oyster exerts such an obvious influence upon Whitstable men, and lives at the bottom of the sea, it would almost seem as if this stationary shell-fish were the father of this other Whitstable trade.

The Whitstable divers may be from thirty to fifty in number, strong, stout, healthy, temperate men, who look like able-bodied sailors. Though not incorporated as a joint-stock company, and protected by a charter, like their friends and neighbours, the free-dredgers, they form themselves, by a kind of Whitstable instinct, into a working brotherhood, under the presidency and guidance of a captain—Mr. Green. Mr. Green is not a diver himself, and has never been under water, either in the helmet or the bell; but he directs the labour of those within his command, purchases their chances for a certain fixed payment before they dive, and acts generally like that very useful, but oftentimes

much-abused "capitalist," without whom so few trades can be successfully carried on.

In stormy seasons, when the wreck of some heavily-laden homeward-bound vessel is an every-day occurrence round our fatal coast, the rooms at the King's Head Inn, in Whitstable, the house of call for divers, are very thinly attended, and the men, with their boats and apparatus, are hurried off in all directions to profitable work. Mr. Green is then in the hourly receipt of telegrams from Lloyd's, or from private owners, requesting him to send "four divers to Moelfre," and four more "to the Goodwin Sands." If a vessel tilts over, as it did the other day in the Victoria Docks, Mr. Green is communicated with to furnish help; and his divers are sometimes sent for from the West Indies, and distant, unknown seas.

These men go down to work in the diving dress, until they are sixty or seventy years of age. The dress consists of a waterproof body-suit, to keep them dry and warm; very heavily-weighted boots, to keep them steady and on their legs; and the well-known helmet with the glass-eye windows, which is furnished with air pumped from the boat above down an elastic tube. So hideous does this dress appear to animals as well as to human beings, that every kind of fish flies from it in dismay. In going down in the West Indian waters, where sharks are painfully plentiful, the Whitstable diver found his

unsightly armour a sufficient protection, and his large-toothed enemies darting away from him, without offering the slightest attack.

The depths that the Whitstable diver has most frequently to go to are ten to fifteen fathoms, or sixty to ninety feet. He sometimes ventures to eighteen fathoms (one hundred and eight feet), but seldom goes beyond, as the weight of water above his head impedes his movements, and the longer his air-tube is paid out, the more difficult it becomes to supply him with sufficient air. The sharp pain in the ears, as if a couple of quills had been thrust into them, is nearly always felt by the diver during the first three or four fathoms of his descent, though it goes off some little time before he reaches the deck of the sunken ship. This pain is caused by the condensed air in the helmet, and the sensation is precisely similar when the diving is performed in a bell.

When the vessel has settled down in a sandy bottom, it is preserved, for many months, from breaking up; and its position may be much the same as it would be when floating in calm water, if it be not tilted over by any under-current drifts. The light, of course, depends a good deal upon the depth and upon the nature of the bottom; but, where there is no chalk to give a milky thickness to the water, the diver pursues his work in a kind of gloomy twilight. By the aid of this, he can see

and feel his way round the ship; but when he ascends to the deck, and winds down into the principal cabins, he finds everything pitch dark, and has nothing to guide him but his hands. This is the most difficult, and yet the most frequent labour he has to encounter; the danger being that, in a large vessel, where the cabin-stairs are deep, and the cabins are long and broad, he may get his air-tube twisted round some unfamiliar projection, and so squeeze off his supply of life from above. In positions such as this, he requires all his nerve and self-possession, all his power of feeling his way back in the exact road that he came. He may have got the precious casket, to which he has been directed, in his arms; but what of that, if he die before he can find the stairs? The cold, helpless masses that bump against his helmet, as they float along the low roof over his head, are the decomposed corpses of those who were huddled together in the cabin when the ship went down. A few of these may be on the floor under his feet, but only when pinned down by an overturned table or a fallen chest. Their tendency is upward—ever upward—and the remorseless sea washes away the dead infant from its dead mother's arms, the dead wife from her dead husband's embrace. If the wreck be in the Channel, the small crabs are already beginning to fatten on their prey.

The diver disentangles himself from this silent

crowd, and ascends the welcome stairs to the deck. The treasure he has rescued is hauled up into the attendant diving-boat; and he turns again to renew his work. He seldom meets with an accident, under water; never, perhaps, with death, and the chief risk he runs is from getting some heavy piece of ship lumber overturned on his long train of air-pipe. Even in this case he feels the sudden check and the want of air, gropes his way back to the obstruction, removes it, signals to his companions to be raised, and reaches the boat exhausted and alarmed, but not so much so as to give up his place in the trade. His earnings mostly take the form of shares in what he recovers. If fortunate, his gains may be large; if unfortunate, they may be small; but no man can grudge him the highest prizes it is possible for him to win. May Whitstable always have the honour of producing such bold and dexterous men as plentifully as she has hitherto done, and may they have the wisdom to keep what they get!

SHOT.

It is the fortune of war to be honoured with monuments. Not always dignified statues standing on short pedestals—not always marble horsemen sitting jauntily upon marble steeds—not always blood and fury relievi, which, with their attendant tablets, adorn the peaceful, dim, religious aisles of the National Cathedral—not always iron dukes, who, in the hats of beadles, and with the batons of the ghosts in Hamlet and Don Giovanni, point for a bronze eternity, to some London stable-yard or skittle-ground—but sometimes it is a more ambitious monument—a column that towers upward into the outer coating of the metropolitan smoke, looking at a distance like a high constable's staff of office, or the ornamental pillar of a lamp for patent candles. Two such columns as these are among the architectural features of our city,—the monument to Lord Nelson, and the pillar of the Duke of York.

Standing in the iron cage that crowns the summit of this latter structure, and directing your eyes in a south-easterly direction to the banks of the river, you may yet see another circular column of

greater altitude, but of more homely exterior, built, in fact, of unpretending brick, and surmounted by nothing more ornamental than a bare flag-staff. This is also a building dedicated to war, but it bears the same relation to the Duke of York's column as the private soldier does to the commander-in-chief, —the same relation to the Nelson column, as the able seaman does to the lord high admiral. It is the Lambeth shot-tower, and if poetical justice had been consulted, instead of the adornment of the metropolis, the statues of those distinguished fighting men whom England delights to honour should have been placed upon the summit, and in niches round the interior of this working monument. There the stream of deadly shot, pouring from roof to basement, with a leaden roar, would have gladdened their marble eyes and ears, and hearts, making a worthy Walhalla for their mighty marble souls, even amongst the Bankside wharves and timber-yards. As it is, the Lambeth shot-tower is in the peaceful possession of Messrs. Walker, Parker, and Company (by whose kind permission I have been allowed to go over the works), and the constant manufacture of the small, globular, insidious instruments of death does not seem to have had an unamiable effect either upon masters, overlookers, or labourers.

Those who are curious in speculations on the effect of certain employments upon the mental and

moral character of man, will probably be glad to learn that the labourer who is occupied for ten hours every day in sharpening daggers and bayonets, or giving the finishing edge to the chine-splitting sabre, is a mild and inoffensive creature in the intervals of business; an affectionate husband; and an indulgent father of a family. Deadly revolvers are not put together in all their fatal beauty by sour cynics who have become weary of, or spiteful to the world, but by hard-handed workmen, who laugh, sing songs, and whistle tunes as they follow their employment, and claim a fair day's wages for what they consider a fair day's work. The motley ingredients that go to make up those engines of war that are known by the titles of bomb-shells and hand-grenades, are not mixed by crook-backed, grinning dwarfs with grinding teeth, and aged, mumbling crones with withered arms. Oh no, my Christian brethren, for these things—like all things else—obey the universal law of supply and demand. Machinery may intervene, and remove the workman to a decent distance from his labour, but grant the necessary stipend, and pay it punctually, and you shall never want for jovial, full-blooded men to obey your bidding. And while one mass of fools are determined to march against another mass of fools for the avowed purpose of fire and slaughter, who can grumble that they have materials put into their hands with which to kill each other in an artistic and

expeditious manner? Therefore, if any enthusiastic and hot-headed members of the Peace Society should ever think of marching bodily against my friends of the shot-tower, I will be one of the first to defend them and their stronghold with all the physical power at my command.

If ever I am to be sent suddenly into the lap of eternity, let it be with my body nicely beplumbed with the smooth, round, glossy shot that I have seen manufactured at Lambeth, and not—like some of my ancestors—with my head split in two, like a water-melon, by a clumsy battle-axe, or one of my eyes knocked into my brain with a cloth yard shaft. Let me—like Julius Cæsar in the forum—die decently; let me—unlike Julius Cæsar—have all the advantages of civilization assisting at my death, as developed in the improvement of the engines of destruction.

A most deceptive place is the shot-department of this Lambeth workshop. If the emblem of peace is plenty—as the poets put it—and the image of plenty, as the painters put it, is a female scattering, right and left, the seeds of golden corn, then must the shot-tower and its warehouses be the very temple of peace, for never did a place that was not a granary, put on such a natural granarial appearance. If any member of that Society that I have before alluded to was brought here blindfolded, and the bandage taken off when he was in the midst of

the sifters and the troughs of shot, he would immediately fancy himself, without any stretch of imagination, in the corn-market of Mark Lane, handling his specimens of the finest agricultural produce. Canvas bags open at the top, and full of the smooth, black, deadly grain, are lying about, to aid in the illusion, which is further assisted by the general cleanliness of this department of the place.

Led by a steady, rushing noise, like the sound of a great waterfall, I take the arm of my imaginary friend from the Peace Society, and in a few minutes we are standing inside the base of the shot-tower. It is a few feet higher than the monument on Fish Street Hill, and about three times its diameter. It is circular in form, built all the way up with solid brickwork, and lighted at intervals with small, arched, cavernous, glazed windows, the recesses of which serve to show the thickness of the wall. Winding up the side is a narrow staircase, plentifully lined with dirt, coaldust, and blacklead, and protected by a thin iron railing. The cost of this tower is estimated at thirty thousand pounds. On the floor are several bars of prepared lead—the material from which the shot is cast—and a kind of copper with a fire burning underneath it. In the centre are two short, broad tubs—like washing-tubs—filled with a thick, muddy-looking water. One is perfectly tranquil on the surface, but the other is bubbling and foaming up like a water-plug

that has been opened in the streets, for a stream of lead is pouring into it from the roof of the tower, at the rate of a ton of shot in every five-and-forty minutes, causing the ceaseless, deafening roar that first excited our attention. Casting our eyes upwards along this stream, and tracing it to its source, we find it coming from a few silvery drops that fall through a small square trap in a wooden platform erected across the top of the building. These drops increase in force and density as they fall lower, until, about the centre of the column, they unite in a straight, thick, slate-coloured stream, lighted up by the sunbeams as it passes the windows in the wall. Looking through the open trap at the top, watching the descent of his handiwork, is the man who is superintending the casting, dressed in a dirty canvas smock shirt and a brown paper cap; presenting the appearance of a small, quaint picture set in a square frame. He has a counterpart in a mild-looking fellow-workman below, who stands calmly by, while the cataract of death is hurrying down to the waters of oblivion. Anxious to examine more closely the source of the cataract, we toil laboriously up the winding stairs, passing the roaring, rushing stream at every turn, until, after a time, we reach the summit. There we find a simmering cauldron full of molten lead, set in a frame of brickwork on a furnace; while by its side stands over the open trap a metal pan, or shallow basin, set

upon four thin iron legs. The bottom of this pan is made of paste, and as the man in the paper cap keeps ladling it full of the red-hot liquid metal from the copper, small, bright, silvery drops keep oozing through, like quicksilver globules, and falling down the open trap like harp strings into the gulf beneath. I look on, perhaps, with culpable indifference, equal to that of the placid workman who goes through his allotted task like a workhouse master serving out the dinner soup; but my shadowy companion of the Peace Society shudders as he feels that in that small, insignificant hand-basin, lies the source of the great stream of death that thunders down into the waters beneath. As we wind slowly down the stairs, we stay to reflect that in the perfectly globular form which the liquid metal assumes as it descends the pit, is contained a beautiful, although minute exemplification of that great law of physics which gave the spherical shape to every planet that rolls above our heads. The object of preparing the water below to receive the metal drops is to preserve the globular form, which would be destroyed by coming in contact with an unyielding substance.

When the white shot is taken out of the tubs of water, it is removed to that part of the building which I term the granary, where it undergoes a simple process of drying. After this, it is found necessary that it should be carefully sifted, to separate the different sizes of shot. The machinery

provided for this is a long, hollow, copper cylinder, perforated with holes like a nutmeg-grater, or the barrel of a musical box, when all the pegs are taken out. These holes are of different sizes, divided into several stages down the cylinder, the smallest coming first, and progressing gradually to the largest, which come last. The cylinder is slightly inclined towards the large perforations, and is made to revolve slowly by steam-power; the shot is then poured in through a funnel at the upper end, and the operation is then left to work itself out. The baby shots, the youthful shots, and the full-grown shots, as they roll into and are worked round the cylinder, find the holes themselves through which they can comfortably squeeze their forms, falling into the different troughs that are waiting to receive them. This is altogether so much like an agricultural operation connected with the seed trade, that my shadowy, peace-loving friend forgets where he is, and, for a time, is happy.

When the deadly grain is collected from the troughs, it is placed within another small, revolving cylinder (not perforated), where its leaden whiteness is changed, by the agency of blacklead, to a bright, polished sable. It is then found that amongst the mass are a number of imperfect globular shot, so much flattened at the pole or poles, as to be utterly unfit for a place in the hearts of men, or birds, or beasts, and only worthy of a tomb

in the waste-box. These false ones are detected by a simple, but very ingenious process. A small, smooth, wooden, fan-shaped platform is fitted up, edged in, and inclining slightly towards two troughs, one placed immediately under the edge of the board, the other at a little distance from it. The polished shot is then poured gently, and with equal force, down a perpendicular funnel that discharges itself upon the inclined platform. The shot that is perfect rolls with sufficient impetus down the board, to carry it over into the further trough; while the imperfect shot either sticks fast with its flattened surface upon the platform, or drops lamely into the nearest waste-trough waiting to receive it.

With this mild, playful, infantine, toy-like process the terrible business of shot-making ends. That which began in the tempest of the roaring shot-tower, is finished calmly in the quiet of the granary of death. We walk out into the street once more, and into the middle of the nineteenth century—I and my shadowy, peace-loving friend; and though those who pass us by can hear no voice, there are certain questions that he pours into my ear which I cannot answer, though I have the will.

ALDERSHOTT TOWN AND CAMP.

PART I.

WHATEVER Aldershott may have been in the former history of its country, it is now a place which the British soldier has thoroughly taken by storm. He has squatted (in obedience to superior orders) upon its peat and sandy common; he has pitched his white tents in groups upon the scanty patches of grass, until they look, in the distance, like conjurors' cups arranged upon a green baize table; he has had planted his long black rows of dwarfed wooden huts down the gravelly slopes, like streets in the early days of some English colonial settlement; and he has had built a long and lofty range of clean, new, yellow-brick barracks which overshadow the little mushroom town that has risen up hurriedly to meet and trade with them.

Along the High Street of this military village runs a single line of railway, devoted to the carriage of coal and building material for the large barrack streets that are still being erected for the accommodation of future cavalry regiments. Every hour of the day a train of luggage trucks is panting along this tramway, and the only wonder is, that the

driver who conducts the engine is not attired in some variety of military undress costume. The omnibuses that come in at intervals from the different railway stations are more often loaded with scarlet heroes in the shape of non-commissioned officers, than with the dingy-coated civilian who is always smoking the pipe of peace. The old familiar face of the Hansom cab is seen in the one main street of this mushroom village, as well as its companion vehicle that runs upon four wheels. A little search will discover a well-stocked stable-yard, as full of these metropolitan conveyances as any cabman's mews in town.

The old red-brick poor-house has been taken possession of—has been legally purchased, I suppose, from the parochial authorities—as an hospital for invalided soldiers. Walking in a small, dusty garden, or sitting on benches under the shadow of the side walls, are a number of convalescents, dressed in light blue serge trousers, jackets, and night-caps, which make them look like comic performers of the Pierrot class in a circus of French horse-riders.

The mushroom village does not seem able to increase its building accommodation fast enough. Twenty thousand men (the number at present* stationed in barracks, huts, and tents) require amusement; to say nothing of the officers, who require various little luxuries, and furniture for

* July, 1859.

their quarters. Scaffold-poles and unfinished brick-work are seen sprouting up at each end of the straggling mile of shops and houses, while the ringing of trowels and the noise of hammers striking nails into wooden planks mingle with the incessant roll of drums from the barracks and the blowing of bugles from the camp beyond an intervening hill. Certain enterprising speculators are not content to wait for the slow, substantial work of bricklayers and stonemasons, and they have erected little road-side zinc structures in which to carry on their commerce, imported from an emigrant's house depôt in London in a few hours, and put up in a single night. The wooden shed is not unrepresented in the town, any more than in the camp, and the whole line of houses—large and small—is joined together in some places with clothes'-lines of dangling stockings and shirts. Bright, new, glaring shops are opened for active business before they are painted or finished; and the stock-in-trade of one furnishing draper (the chief warehouseman in the place) has fairly oozed out into the road.

The titles of most houses have a warlike character, and those who do not advertise themselves as being "by appointment to the camp," attract attention by sticking up "Sebastopol" or "Waterloo House," the "British Hero," and the "Crimean Arms." The road in front of these places is either the dusty highway which has few traces of country

left; a patch of the mangy common which still exists to show the miserable little plot of village that answered to the name of Aldershott half a dozen years ago, or a layer of egg-shaped stones thrown down in a swampy piece of ground before the crowded doors.

Towards evening the British soldier comes out to be amused. If he is quartered in the barracks, or the huts, and is not under canvas, nor yet upon guard, he is at liberty up to half-past nine P.M., at which time he is summoned back to his quarters by the firing of guns, and the sound of regimental bands. A special order will allow him to enjoy the seductive gaieties of the town long after this time, but these privileges are granted to very few. If he neglects to return to his disconsolate regiment at the appointed period, he suffers for it the next day, and several following days, by the extra exertion of "pack drill," if not by a more severe punishment; for the shadow of the hateful "cat" still hovers over the pet military settlement, still comes up through the dust and theatrical glory of a sham field-day, still dims the brightness of the medal and the cross.

About seven o'clock, P.M., the British soldier rushes into the mushroom town of Aldershott for entertainment, and the mushroom town of Aldershott responds most vigorously to the call. The private soldier is able to save about threepence-

halfpenny or fourpence out of his thirteenpence a-day, and this, by a mutual arrangement with some comrade who is on duty for that particular night, is swelled into sevenpence or eightpence. A party of six men will sometimes club together, making a common fund of their individual savings, and this will give the one man out the command of about two shillings.

When two or three thousand soldiers are prowling about, with only two or three hours of time before them, and only fourpence each in their pockets, it is not surprising that a number of beer-shops should strive to commend themselves to their notice. There are wooden beer-shops and brick beer-shops, central public-houses (those immediately opposite the leading barracks, and the road over the hill into the camp), and zinc beer-shops, pitched at the extreme end of the present town-line. There is a very primitive, early Australian mingling of occupations exhibited in some of these mushroom taverns, and while it is probable that you could have your hair properly cut by some of the landlords who draw a rather muddy ale for the refreshment of the British soldier in his hours of relaxation, it is certain that one public-house displays an announcement in its windows about photographic likenesses being taken within at a moderate price. There have been many combinations over the tavern counter before this, but it was reserved for

Aldershott to get rid of the conventional sandwich which has hitherto—for fourpence—gone with the glass of ale, and to substitute a doubtless highly artistic portrait in its place.

No tavern, however small, has the boldness or the folly to attempt to attract the British soldier, without providing him with a room in which he can either sing, or hear singing—can either dance, or be amused by professional dancers. To obtain this very necessary hall of entertainment, nearly every back garden has been covered over with a rude, temporary structure, having something of the camp-hut in its composition, and something of the travelling show. Those houses that have been denied the advantages of a back garden are driven to erect a side building, which sticks out, like a huge wen, from the main establishment. Some have pressed the first-floor rooms into this semi-theatrical service, and a small stage with a very hastily painted back-scene, and two wings of forest-trees, like nothing known by botanical students, are erected at one end of the largest apartment, covering about the same space as a very small shop-front, and being approached by a short flight of moveable steps. In these rooms the British soldier assembles in happy, half-drunken, beer-table rank and file, and in the intervals between the appearance of the "Infant Teresa," who has just gone through the Highland fling, and the ap-

pearance of "Madame de Pumpadoor, the great English soaprano," he is gratified by witnessing a solemn amateur hornpipe, performed by a corporal with two medals dangling from his breast, whose motions are directed by the harmony of an ear-piercing fife and jingling piano, and whose bronzed and bearded face, when he leaps up every now and then, disappears amongst the "flies," like the automaton skeleton's head in the street Fantoccini theatre.

Not far from this entrancing temple of recreation on the first floor is another temple on the ground floor, the programme of whose entertainments, placed upon a board outside the door, in coloured, ill-drawn letters, comprises singing, hornpipes, and Ethiopian serenading up to the military time of half-past nine, and "dancing after gunfire." Looking through the open door into a kind of tent, with a stage at the bottom, you see a solid square of military audience, the scarlet coatee of the Guards relieving the half-naval blue hussar-like uniform of the Royal Artillerymen, and the more sombre green dress of the regular Rifle Corps. The undress cap which these latter soldiers wear in their hours of ease contrasts very favourably with that fearful shako, whose body is like a patent leather crucible or pipkin, and whose summit, at the fore part, is ornamented with a round mossy black ball, that looks like a property apple placed

upon the bonnet of Tell's (theatrical) child, and which must be a fruitful source of temptation as a target to those who are anxious to try their skill with the rifle. Heavy as the leather shako is, when weighed in the scale against other purgatorial penal hats, it must certainly be considered light and airy by the side of the artillery rough beaver head-gear. This drum-shaped military hat, which looks like a lady's hand muff, is heavier and warmer than even the immortal grenadier's cap. They are all a protection against sun and rain, and they all need a protection against themselves.

The attractions of these two concert-saloons are not sufficient to silence the voice or dim the lustre of the Apollo Music Hall, which, having the rather unpromising frontage of a labourer's cottage (part of the original village), suddenly invested with a liquor and music license, and being separated from the main road by the mangy bit of swampy common before alluded to, is compelled to hang out rather prominent signs of the entertainment and conviviality to be found within. A chandler's shop, not far from this abode of melody, has set up a tap of drinkable beer, and though it has not yet been able to bud into the full honours of the Aldershott music-halls, it is not without a little knot of patrons bearing the true military stamp. The eggs, the bacon, the butter, tea and cheese, and the loaves of bread, are huddled in a heap in a small window

and a few shelves on one side of the shop, while all the available space on the other side is turned into a small red-curtained tap-room. The stray child who goes to this mongrel shop for its mother's breakfast or tea is introduced with gaping mouth into all the humours of rollicking military canteen life, and is made to take a sip out of a mug of ale by a staggering hero in a scarlet coat, while its packet of grocery knick-knacks is being prepared.

The British soldier is not entirely of a musical turn, and though he is seen through many tavern-room windows standing up against a fireplace, with his eyes fixed upon the ceiling, in a rapt and enthusiastic manner, singing a sentimental song for the amusement of his comrades, or leading a wild chorus in which they are all endeavouring to join, he likewise haunts the roadside in little knots, which look, at a distance, like beds of geraniums, and he marches in along the dusty main road in groups of ten or twelve, as if he had been for an evening walk to Farnborough, or some adjacent town.

Scarlet does not always consort with scarlet, nor green with green; and a Stirlingshire militiaman, in his white jacket, plaid trousers, and Scotch cap, relieves the monotony of colour by walking between two green riflemen and an artilleryman in blue.

A close examination of the many passing sun-

burnt faces shows how largely the Irish peasant has, at some time or another, taken the Queen's shilling, as well as the agricultural operative of our provincial farms and fields. The Scotchman is there, in spite of his reputed caution and love of money; and the Yorkshireman is sometimes content to forget his proverbially assigned keenness, and to mount guard, fire cannon, and practise with the sword. One class, however, has never yet been represented in the British army, and probably never will be, and that is the English Jew. Whatever trouble or madness has fallen upon the chosen people of Old Jewry, in this country, since the bad old times when they were persecuted by half-savage kings, there has never yet been any young runaway sprig of Israel who was weak enough to rush into the arms of that model dancing-master-looking, faultlessly-dressed sergeant, who stands at likely street corners with those fluttering ribbons and that light and elegant gold-headed cane. He has been weak enough to get into Parliament, but he has never been weak enough to get into the ranks.

It is an affecting sight to see a couple of soldiers staggering under the too heavy weight of their detestable shakos, and not, of course, under the strength of the Aldershott ale, supporting each other, although belonging to different corps, to the best of their ability; wearing their oppressive head-dresses tilted over to the backs of their heads (of

course, for relief), regardless of the even set of a breast-belt (of course, for the same reason), their eyes dull and sleepy, their steps uncertain, their mouths vainly endeavouring to relate some barrack story, and their hands ever ready to give the proper mechanical military salute to every person whom they pass. As the evening advances, many groups of these suffering military pedestrians may be seen upon the Aldershott roads, the stiffness of the tried soldier, in which they started with such pride from their barracks, having entirely melted away, and their bodies being as limp as those of the rawest recruit who has never had the advantage of a day's effective drill. They are not always the latest to get into hut or barracks, although so seemingly uncertain in their steps. Sometimes they escape the sentries, and roll into their own proper beds; at other times they pass their slumbers in a cell of the guard-house, to dream, towards morning, of "pack-drill," or, perhaps, the "cat."

Mingling with these men for a moment, but hurrying by them with the dignity of a heavy day's good work done, and done well, and the sense of another heavy day's work to follow to-morrow, will be half a dozen stonemasons and bricklayers, speeding home with their empty dinner-basins swinging in handkerchiefs from their hands. No signs of fraternity are exchanged between these soiled and powdered labourers and the steady or unsteady red,

white, blue, and green groups of lounging heroes whom they pass. They each belong to different worlds, and they know it.

The principal resort of the "crack" soldiers and the non-commissioned officers (corporals, sergeants, sergeant-majors, and such like) is a crimson music-hall attached to the principal hotel in the mushroom town. This place is well ventilated by numerous windows that open on a small side street, and is fitted up with a stage, the chief object at the back of which is a clear-faced, full-sized circular clock. The moment the hands of this clock draw near half-past nine P.M. the amusements (consisting chiefly of singing) work up to a climax; allusion is made to the approach of "gun-fire" from the stage; an acrobat boy, in crimson leggings and spangled body, makes himself very busy in washing the empty glasses of the drinkers; while his father, a middle-aged acrobat, in a precisely similar dress, is extremely active in performing the duties of a waiter. The leading comic singer having sung his last popular song, for that night, to an almost exclusively military audience, comes down from the stage to exchange congratulations all round, with his scarlet and blue admirers (after the style so much in fashion at distinguished London music-halls); the hands of the stage clock reach the expected period, the gun fires, the bugles sound, a brass band at the opposite barracks begins to play, the soldiers slowly disperse,

having a quarter of an hour's grace before them; and a long interval takes place in the amusements of the crimson saloon, until its civilian patrons begin, somewhat later, to assemble.

Following the last military straggler, I pass a little knot of artillerymen, who are taking an affectionate leave of two young ladies (without bonnets) at the corner of the street, and ascend the gravelly hill before me, on which stand the huts of the staff-officers of the camp; for I have arranged to pass the night in the quarters of my friend, Lieutenant Hongwee, of the Antrim Rifles.

I reach the brow of the hill in the dark, leaving the row of lights of the mushroom town beneath me, and behind me, and coming upon long, silent, black lines of huts, varied and divided by broad gritty roads of stony gravel, and surmounted by a wide semicircle of streaky orange horizon in front.

Before I have found out the line of huts, and the particular "block" in which I am to pass the night, I am challenged half a dozen times by half a dozen sentries, but as I reply, according to my instructions, "A friend," I am not arrested, run through the body, nor shot through the head.

I pass a few glimmering lights in hut windows, and a few murmuring huts, where the men are divided off in small parties to sleep, and find my lodging on the tented field at last.

Lieutenant Hongwee's quarters (like the quarters of every subaltern) are not sufficiently commodious to accommodate two persons with comfort; but that young and promising officer is taking his turn as the captain of the watch (a twenty-four hours' guard-house duty which falls to his lot, perhaps, once in six months), and I have full permission to usurp his bed. If any difficulty should occur (which is not anticipated), I am furnished—no doubt, against strict military rule—with the "parole" and "counter-sign." "Romsey" will carry me through anything (except officers' practical jokes) up to the solemn midnight hour, and "Stockport" will be of equal service to me at any time afterwards.

PART II.

After being disturbed by a variety of noises throughout the night, the clanking of arms, and the talking of the men on guard in the adjacent guard-house, the squabbling of the sentry when he took a drunken straggler into custody, and the mysterious humming of the telegraphic wires, which stretch across the line of the camp, and form a gigantic Æolian harp; the dweller in the hut is thoroughly awakened at five o'clock A.M., by the sound of bugles arousing the men for the day. The officer seldom makes his appearance before the hour

of ten A.M., having nothing to do before the parade duty at eleven A.M.; but the men are considerately beat into bed at the almost infantine time of half-past nine at night, and they are punctually beat up in the morning to be stirring with the lark.

The hut of a subaltern may be described in its outline as part of a coal-shed, a corner in a black, tarred wooden block that is all ground-floor. These huts are built of rough, unseasoned planks, too thin to keep out the cold in winter, or the heat in summer. The temperature, even at five o'clock on a July morning, is that of a bakehouse shortly after the batches of bread have been drawn. The sun succeeds in coming through the slender roof, if it does not appear in actual beams upon the floor.

The taste of a young officer may lead him to decorate this cupboard in any variety of style, but the size of the area to be decorated will impose a limit on his fancy. There is room for a small iron bedstead, a table, a washstand, a chest of drawers, and two chairs; which will leave about a square yard of flooring for exercise and the toilet. A fireplace and one small six-pane window complete the fittings of these huts, which look like the lodgings let to single young men about Stepney, at two shillings a-week, or the summer-houses that used to be erected in the grounds of the market-gardeners at Hoxton.

A "block," as it is called, contains six compart-

ments, each one of which is considered to be sufficient for a sub-officer's sleeping quarters. A captain takes two of these cupboards; and a field-officer the whole block of six.

Standing upon the brow of the hill at the highest part of the South Camp (on the other side of which lies Aldershott Town), and looking towards the north, the whole encampment lies in a hollow bow before you. At your side is the hut of General Knollys, the commander-in-chief at the camp, who saw a night attack about five and forty years ago. The ostensible design of Aldershott is the practical education of the soldier and his officer.

The huts of the South Camp are arranged in alphabetical lines, or rows, for the sake of easy reference, and they stretch down the gravelly slope, towards the north, in many broad black parallels for full half a mile, until they reach the sandy flat that lies between them and the North Camp, on the further ascent. This flat is divided by a canal that is crossed by a pontoon bridge supported by tubs; the real artillery glowing-red pontoons lying high and dry at the side, looking like gigantic German sausages of a light and brilliant hue. A winding gravelly pathway crosses this desert for nearly a mile, and then you enter the corresponding black lines of the North Camp huts, which look thinner from the distance, and ascend for another half mile upon a more moderate slope.

A line of these huts, in which, perhaps, the officers and men of two different corps may be quartered, is constructed in divisions, each one of which is exactly like all the rest.

There is a bread-hut, a meat-hut, and a library-hut; a men's school-hut, a children's school-hut, which latter looks like the national schools in many small villages. There are a number of officers' sleeping-huts, placed back to back, and also a number of men's sleeping-huts, in the same position. There is an orderly-hut and a guard-hut, the latter provided with several cool though dismal cupboards, that are called cells, in which are confined the refractory privates who have fallen under the too tempting dissipation of Aldershott Town. There is the women's wash-hut, at which stray pedlars' carts, that are passing through the country, are observed to stand, without any visible driver, for a very long period of time; there is the family-hut, for the married men, and the long canteen, facing the yellow, burning, gravelly road, where the soldier indulges in a little half-baked conviviality during the middle of the day. There is the armourers'-hut, a brick edifice, with a fluted zinc roof; the shoemakers'-hut, in which a number of soldiers are at work, with cobblers' shirts and military legs; and there is the tailors'-hut, where our future field-marshals are sewing on a button, or repairing a yawning rent. There is a hut that is labelled "Ablution," which is

very good language for a building containing a long bench and a number of bowls, where the common soldiers go to wash. There is an officers' mess-room hut, a long, black, wooden building, containing many small windows adorned with crimson curtains; and there is a non-commissioned officers' mess-room hut, in which the corporals and sergeants are accustomed (when single men) to refresh their exhausted bodies. There is a cook-house hut, a fair-sized fluted zinc building, which is filled with steaming ovens, containing many shapes of beef, a roaring furnace, a number of perspiring half-military greasy cooks, presided over by a stiff corporal, who orders the addition of a little salt, or the uncovering of a pannikin, as if he were leading on to glory. From the open doors of this dinner-magazine is wafted a fragrant breath of onions and cabbage, a perfume that carries you, in imagination, to some of the back streets of Paris on the noon of an August day.

At the back of the cook-house hut is the Quartermaster's store-hut, a precisely similar fluted zinc building, that looks like a railway goods depôt, being devoted to boxes, packages, and bags. The hospital-huts are placed by themselves, being distinguished by white-painted doors. They hold about a dozen beds each, and some of the French circus-like Pierrot convalescents are lounging about them, as they were lounging about the red-bricked Eliza-

bethan hospital in the town. These are the main features of a line of huts, at any part of the camp.

Still standing upon the hill by the General's hut, and looking across the camp, you can see to your right, towering above the huts, the shed-like church of the South Camp, and, further on, the shed-like church of the North Camp; the white, gleaming, cup-shaped tents of the Royal Artillery, who are roughing it under canvas, and in the distance, across the common, an enclosed racket-ground, which looks like a large stone dust-bin. To the extreme left are the distant tents of the guards, brought out in pleasant relief against a green background of foliage. Trees are by no means plentiful at or near Aldershott Camp, any more than grass, and very few of the hot, dusty elevations can boast of a top-knot, or a whisker of verdure.

I pursue my survey by walking through the camp, and discover a telegraph-office hut, a fire-brigade hut, a post-office hut, and a luggage-office hut. The latter belongs to the South Eastern Railway Company, who are commencing great railway works in connection with their line to this camp, an important, although a quiet, and, as far as the country is concerned, an inexpensive step on towards the perfection of the national defences. Close by this building is a privileged yard, conducted under military law, for the hire of broughams, dog-carts, and

the ubiquitous Hansom. There are certain camp-followers which dog the steps of the soldier, wherever he goes, from the general-in-chief to the lowest private in a regiment.

Towards nine o'clock in the morning the sounds of many military bands of music begin to be heard, and the shrill whistle of the fife comes from the open windows and doors of huts, as well as the more mellow tone of the clarionet. Bodies of men, in different uniforms, appear in oblong masses upon the burning stony slopes, and artillery soldiers, driving heavy waggons or field-trains, pass along the cross-roads from side to side. Heavy dragoons in thick, muddy, unbraced trousers, and very dirty shirts, with bronzed faces, chests, and arms, appear with pails and cans from behind the tarred huts, and disappear again. A company of bugle-youths plunge out from a side lane, followed by a little girl child, who strides wildly to keep step with them. Children play about the red-hot gravel, regardless of sun-strokes, amusing themselves, in one instance, with a worn-out battered shako. Stern warriors are seen through laundry-hut windows, nursing babies among the baskets of clothes, or drinking tea out of large blue saucers. Other stern warriors come out attired in all the regulation glory of thick, warm, close-fitting costume, with the glass standing at one hundred degrees in the shade—even keeping to that wonderful instrument of military torture,

the immortal stock. For two hundred years this ingenious, unbending variation of the old cravat has gripped the soldier by the neck, and there is no prospect, at present, of its relaxing its hold. It has many things to recommend it. When a regiment, from overwork, or an insufficiency of food, presented a sickly appearance, by obliging the men to tighten the stock as much as they could bear without suffocation, a ruddy glow was produced in the face, and every sign of a full habit of body. These instruments of clothing, before now, have been made of black horse-hair, tolerably hard, and transformed into a collar as firm as iron by the insertion of a slip of wood, which, acting on the larynx, and compressing every part of the neck, gave the eyes a wonderful prominence, and the wearer an almost supernatural appearance of healthy vigour. The present military stock is not quite as bad as this, although it is bad enough.

A squad of raw, unformed lads is marched out for drill, showing the material that the recruiting sergeant is driven to enlist with the Queen's shillings, in default of better youths, or men. They drop out of the ranks even on an ordinary field-day, and on real and active service they would die, like children, at the roadside. They have been plucked too early for the game of war, and they are as worthless as all untimely fruit.

A sombre-looking soldier is walking slowly down

one of the lines, carrying a bag in one hand and a can in the other, and followed by a shabbily-dressed woman, who is nursing a sleeping child. His head is bent down, and he has no remark to máke, as she pours some low, ceaseless story of wrong and suffering into his ear.

By this time I thought it right that I should pay a visit of condolence to my friend Lieutenant Hongwee, who had been compelled to pass the night in dismal communion with a whisky-bottle, at the regimental guard-house of the Royal Antrim Rifles. I looked round the apartment. Two Windsor chairs (the everlasting regulation chair all through the army), a dirty table, a fireplace, and deal shelf, were all the furniture. A bit of composite candle had burnt out and guttered down in a champagne bottle, and the shutter of the window at one end of the hut was kept open with a short rusty poker. The bare walls were ornamented with fancy cartoons, mottoes, and initials, drawn by idle, yawning heroes, with pieces of burnt wood; and the few pegs that were intended to support any superfluous out-door military gear, were cut to pieces with sword-thrusts. The floor was blackened with accumulated dust, and the whole place, which was about ten yards long and five yards broad, looked like a good dry skittle-ground without the skittles.

"My poor friend," I said, with compassion, looking at a tin machine that resembled a number

of large shaving-pots and boxes rolled into one, "what have we here?"

"Don't allude to it," he said, with a sudden spasm, "you see my dinner-pan."

"Your what?" I asked.

"My dinner-pan," he answered. "To add to the needless torment of the wretched officer on guard, his mess-man—his club-steward, whom he liberally pays—declines to send him his proper food. His regimental servant goes up to the mess-room, and brings down the concrete structure now before you. The bottom of the can contains the soup, a greasy broth; a box above contains potatoes and peas floating together in more greasy broth; the next step in the pyramid is another box, full of a dry and leathery grilled beef-steak; and the apex is a metal pill-box containing pepper and salt."

The first thing we did, when the guard was properly relieved, and an unfortunate Highland ensign was imprisoned in the place of Lieutenant Hongwee, was to visit Truefitt's. Truefitt's is a living example of how a good fight may be won by combination, courage, and determination. Who would care to live without his "toilet club?" The great barber has got his hut—his little oasis of luxury—firmly planted in the desert under the constant patronage of military men, far more than the constant regulation of military law. Faithful camp-follower—true and reliable as the Hansom cabman,

he is found, in the hour of danger, at his post. What would the regulators of the British Army do without such a comforting retreat?

Why are private soldiers warned off from this agreeable lounge by a notice outside the door, which says, "For officers only?" The private soldier is not in the habit of having his hair worried with strange and varied brushes, nor of having it pacified afterwards with alchemical ointments. The private soldier is not in the habit of paying half-a-crown to have his hair clipped at the back, washed with egg-flip, watered with a watering-can, his beard shaved and his pocket-handkerchief scented with the latest perfume known. Perhaps it was thought that private soldiers sometimes come in for legacies, and go in for the genteel thing, vastly, and the notice was meant to provide against such a contingency. Many officers would have to be excluded, too, if they had no property, and were compelled to live on their pay. Five shillings a-day for an ensign, and six shillings for a lieutenant, will not go far in mess-dinners and tailors' bills, much less in toilet-clubs.

Passing out of this fragrant warehouse in the desert, on our way to visit one of the encampments, we came upon half-a-dozen artillerymen, who were undergoing the punishment of "pack-drill." They were the drunken prisoners of last night, who, after being tried before their superior officers in the orderly-room, were condemned for a certain

time to walk the day in the full heat of the sun, in their heaviest marching clothes, and with their full marching "kit" upon their backs. They had now been walking up and down for some time, and their legs seemed to give way in their heavy jack-boots.

Going across the black lines of huts, our ears were suddenly saluted with a terrific outburst of military melody, and looking in one of the quarter-masters' store-rooms, we found about thirty men and boys, of all sizes, furnished with sax-horns of curious shape, and ophicleides as large as pumps, blowing up the roof with a popular quick-step march. The conductor, with the most vigorous action, was endeavouring to keep them in order, as they stood amongst the boxes and packages of their temporary practising-room. One short-necked, full-blooded performer, whose back was towards me, caused his neck to contract and expand in such an extreme manner, while supplying his unwieldy instrument with air, that I expected every moment to see him burst, and his head drop out of sight into his opened body. I never saw anything like it, except the left cheek of an old trumpeter, which from long use, and from being nothing but thin skin, used to sink into a hole when his instrument was at rest, and blow out in an almost transparent bladder when he began to play.

Leaving this close-packed hall of harmony, we made our way to the theatre, a building that stood fairly in our road to the canvas quarters of the artillery. A wooden hut, with several entrances, looking like a travelling show that has squatted upon common land; an audience portion, capable of seating about a hundred persons; an orchestra, like a large tank; a stage such as is generally run up during a violent private theatrical fever in a back drawing-room; and a property-room, in which the hollow mockeries of the drama are combined with the solid realities of a habitation and a laundry, comprise nearly all that need be described of the well-known Theatre Royal, South Camp, Aldershott. It was manned, during the day, by one male attendant, who managed it as if it had been a ship, hauling up the scenes like sails, and putting it in trim working order for the performance of the evening.

A quarter of an hour's walk brought us at last to the Royal Artillery encampment. There was a large square enclosure full of horses, like a horse fair, railed in with ropes and stakes, and surrounded by an irregular line of tents. A man in military trousers and a dirty shirt—the amateur blacksmith of the regiment—was hammering out a horse-shoe upon an anvil, which stood full and unprotected on the sand, under the noon-day sun. Not far from this workman was a camp fire, over which was cooking the dinner of the men. A couple of narrow

ditches, first cut in the earth in the form of an equal cross, and then filled full of wood, furze, or any dry rubbish about, that will burn; a covering of sheet-iron strips placed over these ditches; a peat chimney built in the centre, for the purpose of drawing the fire below; the wood or furze set alight, and the kettles, like pails, placed along the iron plates on the side where they are most likely to avoid the smoke and boil the quickest; and the rough-and-ready camp oven is complete. When the lids of the pail-kettles are lifted up, bushels of potatoes, spongy masses of cabbage, and irregular blocks of heavy pudding, like lumps of clay, are boiling and bubbling away; and one glance of the glaring mid-day sun seems to stir up the broth as much as the hidden, choking fire below.

"That is the elegant kind of picnic," said Lieutenant Hongwee, "which we are often required to assist at: with this difference, that we are marched twenty miles away to some solitary spot, kept out for several days and several nights under canvas, and made to kill our own meat before we eat it, or feed upon blackberries, like the Children in the Wood."

I saw that this was a tender subject, and I made no reply, but contented myself with observing the other features of the camp.

Most of the men were having a short rest under the tents, being disposed of in the same manner as

they sleep at night. About a dozen were lying together on straw, with their heads resting on their great-coats at the lower circumference of the tent, and their feet meeting together at the pole in the centre, like the spokes of a wheel. At a given word of command they all started up, and went to work with their horses, looking more like dirty gipsy ostlers than the clean and clipt soldier who parades the London streets.

The tent of a sub-officer, to which we were invited, was not remarkable for any luxury, except the luxury of being a lodging for one. The sand at the bottom was covered over with a layer of green leaves and a sprinkling of straw; the occupant's soap, and towel, and brush were lying on the top of a tin box; his small looking-glass was on the ground, leaning against the side of the tent; he had made a reclining couch of one portmanteau, a money-box to hold loose silver of another, and he had still another huge, black, drum-like box to offer a friend. He was quite a gipsy king in his tent.

As we sat looking out of the mouth of the tent across the artillery encampment, and past the lower end of the North Camp, we could see a thin winding line of scarlet, that looked like a row of poppies in a field. There were a few black patches (the blue artillerymen and the green riflemen) studded about the sandy flat of common, with here and there a few white stragglers, probably the Stirlingshire Militia,

or some Foot Guardsmen in flannel undress jackets; but the scarlet patches prevailed in that direction; and looking further, we saw the white peaks of another range of tents.

"The Guards are as badly off there as you are here," said Lieutenant Hongwee, alluding to the scarlet patch and the distant tents, and addressing the gipsy king.

"Worse," returned the gipsy king, "infinitely worse. We only came from quarters at Woolwich at the dull time of the year; but those poor fellows have just been sent down from London in the height of the season, to be placed under canvas at once. Canvas is a capital thing properly applied—when it means a dancing tent on a lawn at Fulham—but canvas at Aldershott is a far less agreeable affair."

We sauntered slowly towards the Rifle mess-room for breakfast; Lieutenant Hongwee rather despondingly, and I rather disposed to condole with my friend and companion.

The mess-room was a long, airy building, very lofty for the camp, with a small ante-room in front, and having the mysteries of the cooking department concealed by a chocolate-coloured cloth curtain, stretching right across the apartment near the back. The long dining-table and side-board were well covered with food, and the chairs were the everlasting Windsors. To give a dining-

room aspect to these rough companions, they were covered with a padded leather seat and back: a contrivance which each officer provides himself, and carries about with him from one station to another.

"Is this a fair specimen of your ordinary day?" I inquired, as we proceeded with our morning repast.

"It is, with the exception of a few field-days, and our penal servitude under canvas. We rise about ten A.M.; we show upon parade for about an hour, and after twelve, until the bugle sounds to dress for mess at seven, we have no settled occupation whatever."

"There is a club-house built in the South Camp, is there not?"

"There is, but with a rate of subscription almost prohibiting the entrance of poor subalterns. When there you can only read, play at billiards, or talk. Most men, like myself, who get five or six shillings a-day, spend twice as much as they earn, and that without indulging in any particular extravagance. As most things are done by mutual and equal subscription, the pressure of the service outlay falls heaviest upon the junior members. The major or colonel, who sits opposite to me at dinner, pays no more to the mess fund than I do."

"You have field sports for your amusement, which need not cost anything."

"No one cares for them. A few men use the racket-ground; but very few. Rowing up the canal is a favourite recreation; to drink beer at a public-house, where they profess to keep an 'officers' room,' and then to row back again. The common soldier is better off than we are, for he has his town and his concert-rooms; but we can do nothing except wait wearily for the welcome summons to mess."

My vehicle, on its road to the North Camp railway station, rolled me past trucks of camp furniture, past cabs containing field-officers, past solitary scarlet soldiers, who stood like lonely poppies in the meadows, past other scarlet soldiers who wound slowly along the drab and dusty lanes, and past a group of boy-children in green uniform, coming through a hedge, who looked as if the very cradles of the country had been emptied for their contents to be pressed into the ranks. I broke through another crowd of soldiers at the station, and plunged into my carriage, glad to be whirled away.

CHANGE FOR NUGGETS.

I HAVE done a very bold and sensible thing. I have thrown off the irksome tyranny of my currency doctor. It was only a few days ago that he felt my mental pulse, and declared me to be in a highly dangerous condition. My answer was, that I would take no more nostrums, pamphlets, tracts, and inky abominations; that I would listen to no more denunciations of rival systems; I would take nothing but the benefit of the waters of fact; and I went at once to the Mint, on Tower-hill, to get them. I went to the Master of the Mint. Before I accepted his kind offer to show me his establishment, I held a short conference with the shade of Ricardo, the great political economist.

"I am about to look upon currency from a mechanical point of view," I said to the shade, "and I want your opinion upon the fixed price of gold I have heard so much of."

"Gold fixes its own price," returned the shade of Ricardo, "because of its uniform steadiness of value. It is for this rare quality that it is chosen as the standard basis of our currency."

"But why," I returned, "is three pounds

seventeen shillings and tenpence halfpenny always to be given for an ounce of gold, when all other commodities are always rising and falling?"

"Coinage labour," he answered, rather evading the question, "is given gratuitously to the public: you take your precious metal to the Mint, and the Mint returns you the same weight in the shape of sovereigns, even adding the necessary alloy, without making any charge for the process."

"Then any digger," I asked, "may take his nuggets, however small, and exchange them immediately for money?"

"Theoretically, yes, but, practically, no," he answered, "for they receive no metal there, to save trouble, that is less in value than ten thousand pounds sterling. The Bank of England is their collecting agent for small amounts; being bound to purchase any gold that is tendered to it, giving notes or gold coin in exchange, after the metal has been examined and tested by the regular refiners."

"This is under the abused act of 1844," I said, "which is since your time."

"It is," he replied, "and there is no hardship to the Bank involved in the compulsory purchase. They issue their notes at once to the amount of gold (whether in coin or bullion) in their cellars; and they charge three-halfpence an ounce commission to compensate them for the delay of a

week or so that takes place in the process of coining."

"Thank you," I replied; "I feel considerably better; and I will now examine this mechanical process of coining."

The first place that I was conducted to was the central office, where the ingots of gold are weighed when they come in from the Bank of England, or from other sources, and where a small piece is cut off each slab for the Mint assayer to test the whole by. A nugget of gold may be of any shape, and is generally an irregular dead yellow lump, that looks like pale gingerbread; but an ingot of gold is a small brick. After the precious metals have been scrupulously weighed in the central office, they are sent to the melting-house down an iron tramway. All the account-books in the Mint are balanced by weight; so that even where there is so much money, there is no use made of the three columns bearing the familiar headings of £ s. d. The melting-house is an old-fashioned structure, having what I may call the gold kitchen on one side, and the silver kitchen on the other, with just such a counting-house between the two—well provided with clean weights, scales, well-bound books, and well-framed almanacks—as George Barnwell may have worked in with his uncle some years before he became gay. The counting-house commands a view of both melting-kitchens, that the

superintendents may overlook the men at their work. Although the Mint contains nearly a hundred persons resident within its walls—forming a little colony with peculiar habits, tastes, and class feelings of its own—a great many of the work-people are drawn from the outer world. Dinner is provided for them all within the building; and, when they pass in to their day's work, between the one soldier and the two policemen at the entrance-gate, they are not allowed to depart until their labour is finished, and the books of their department are balanced, to see that nothing is missing. If all is found right, a properly signed certificate is given to each man, and he is then permitted to go his way..

The gold kitchen and the silver kitchen are never in operation on the same day, and the first melting process that I was invited to attend was the one in the latter department. The presiding cook, well protected with leather apron, and thick coarse gloves, was driving four ingot-bricks of solid silver into a thick plumbago crucible, by the aid of a crowbar. When these four pieces were closely jammed down to a level with the surface of the melting-pot, he seasoned it with a sprinkling of base coin, by way of alloy; placing the crucible in one of the circular recesses over the fiery ovens to boil. The operations in the gold kitchen are similar to this, except that they are on a much

smaller scale. A crucible is there made to boil three or four ingots, worth from four to five thousand pounds sterling; and where machinery is employed in the silver kitchen, much of the work is done in the gold kitchen with long iron tongs that are held in the hand.

When the solid metal has become fluid, a revolving crane is turned over the copper, and the glowing red-hot crucible is drawn from its fiery recess, casting its heated breath all over the apartment, and is safely landed in a rest. This rest is placed over a number of steel moulds, that are made up, when cool, like pieces of a puzzle, and which look like a large metal mouth-organ standing on end, except that the tubes there present are square in shape, and all of the same length. The crucible rest is acted upon by the presiding cook and another man, through the machinery in which it is placed, and is made to tilt up at certain stages, according to regulated degrees. When the molten metal, looking like greasy milk, has poured out of the crucible until it has filled the first tube of the metal mouth-organ, sounding several octaves of fluid notes, like the tone of bottle emptying, the framework of moulds is moved on one stage by the same machinery, so as to bring the second tube under the mouth of the crucible, which is then tilted up another degree. This double action is repeated until the whole blinking, white-heated

interior of the crucible is presented to my view, and nothing remains within it but a few lumps of red-hot charcoal.

The next step is to knock asunder the framework of moulds, to take out the silver, now hardened into long dirty-white bars, and to place these bars first in a cold-water bath, and then upon a metal counter to cool. These bars are all cast according to a size, which experience has taught to be exceedingly eligible for conversion into coin.

From the silver-melting process I was taken to the gold-coining department, the first stage in dealing with the precious metals being, as I have before stated, the same. Passing from bars of silver to bars of gold, I entered the Great Rolling Room, and began my first actual experience in the manufacture of a sovereign.

The bars of gold, worth about twelve hundred pounds sterling, that are taken into the Great Rolling Room, are about twenty-one inches long, one and three-eighths of an inch broad, and one inch thick. As they lie upon the heavy truck, before they are subject to the action of the ponderous machinery in this department, they look like cakes of very bright yellow soap.

An engine of thirty-horse power sets in motion the machinery of this room, whose duty it is to flatten the bars until they come out in ribands of an eighth of an inch thick, and considerably in-

creased in length. This process, not unlike mangling, is performed by powerful rollers, and is repeated until the ribands are reduced to the proper gauged thickness, after which they are divided and cut into the proper gauged lengths. Having undergone one or two annealings in brick ovens attached to this department, these fillets may be considered ready for another process, which takes place after twelve hours' delay, in a place that is called the Drawing Room.

In this department, the coarser work of the Rolling Room is examined and perfected. The fillets, or ribands of gold, after being subjected to another rolling process, the chief object of which has been to thin both ends, are taken to a machine called a draw-bench, where their thickness is perfectly equalized from end to end. The thin end of the golden riband is passed between two finely polished fixed steel cylinders into the mouth of a part of the concrete machine, which is called a "dog." This dog is a small, thin carriage, travelling upon wheels over a bench, under which revolves an endless chain. In length and appearance this dog is like a seal, with a round, thick head, containing two large eyes that are formed of screws, and having a short-handled inverted metal mallet for a hat. Its mouth is large, and acts like a vice, and when it has gripped the thin end of the golden riband in its teeth, its tail is affixed to the endless

chain, which causes it to move slowly along the bench, dragging the riband through the fixed cylinders. When the riband has passed through its whole length, the thin end at its other extreme coming more quickly through the narrow space between the cylinders, causes it to release itself with a sudden jerk, and this motion partly raises the mallet-cap of the backing dog, which opens its broad mouth, and drops its hold of the metal badger that it has completely drawn. A workman now takes the fillet and punches out a circular piece the exact size of a sovereign, and weighs it. If the golden dump, or blank, as it is called, is heavy, the dog and the cylinders are put in requisition once more to draw the riband thinner; but, if the weight is accurate (and perfect accuracy at this stage is indispensable), the smooth, dull, impressionless counter, looking like the brass button of an Irishman's best blue coat, is transferred to another department, called the Press Cutting Room.

The Cutting Room may claim the honour of being the noisiest place in the building. The finest oration, or the most melodious song that ever came from human lips, would be utterly thrown away in this department; and if any disciple of James Watt took to instructing pupils here in the mysteries of shafts, presses, and fly-wheels, it would have to be done through the medium of the deaf and dumb alphabet.

In this room, twelve cutting-presses, arranged on a circular platform, about two feet in height, surround an upright shaft, and a horizontal revolving fly-wheel; and at the will of twelve boys, who attend and feed the presses, the punches attached to the presses are made to rise and fall at the rate of a stroke a second. The ribands, cut into handy lengths, are given to the boys, who push them under the descending punches, as sliding frames are pushed under table microscopes. The blanks fall into boxes, handily placed to receive them, and the waste—like all the slips and cuttings, trial dumps, failures, etc., in every department—is weighed back to the melting-kitchen for the next cooking-day.

Vigilance, as my guide impressed upon me, is necessary at every stage of gold-coining. If the rolling be not carefully done, the draw-bench will not rectify all its errors; if the draw-bench be not nicely adjusted, the thickness of the metal riband will not be equal, and the cutting-punches, however properly turned and tempered, would produce pieces of varying weight.

From the noise and clatter of the Cutting Room I was conducted to the elegant calmness of the Weighing Room, a department handsomely fitted up, and looking like a show-room for elaborate chronometers. Here is performed one of the most interesting and delicate operations throughout the

whole Mint. Upon the counter, on ornamental iron stands, is a silent council of thirteen automaton balances, who pass judgment, individually, upon the work in the foregoing departments, and decide with unerring exactness upon the weight of the golden dumps. These automaton judges sit under glass cases, to preserve them from damp and dust, and they have the appearance of a row of French skeleton clocks. The golden dumps that are passed into the Weighing Room, still looking like the aforesaid Irishman's brass button, are distributed amongst the balances, passing down a receiving slide on to a strip of steel. This strip of steel is made to advance and recede at certain intervals, perhaps of a quarter of a minute, and at each advance it pushes a blank on to a beautifully poised scale-table, sensitive to the slightest variations of weight. For a few seconds the machine appears to reflect, and then the golden dump is gently pushed off the scale by the arrival of another piece on the steel slide for judgment. The first, if "heavy," disappears down the outer one of three flattened tubes; if "light," down the inner one; and, if quite correct in weight, down the centre compartment. By careful manipulation, much of the work is now made to fall in the medium boxes, thereby effecting much saving in the annual expenses of the Mint—a reform that is attributable to the present working master and his superintendents.

From the Weighing Room I followed the dumps that were declared to be in a perfect condition to a department called the Marking Room, where they received their first surface impression. This room contains eight machines, whose duty it is to raise a plain rim, or protecting edge, round the surface circumference of the golden blanks. This is done by dropping them down a tube, which conducts them horizontally to a bed prepared for them, where they are pushed backwards and forwards between two grooved "cheeks" made of steel, which raise the necessary rim by pressure.

From this department I am taken by my guide to a long bakehouse structure, called the Annealing Room. Here I find several men-cooks very busy with the golden-rimmed blanks, making them into pies of three thousand each, in cast-iron pans covered with wrought-iron lids, and closed up with moist Beckenham clay. These costly pies are placed in large ovens, where they are baked in intense heat for an hour, and then each batch is drawn as its time expires, and is not opened before the pans become cool. The gray plastic loam which was placed round the dish is baked to a red crisp cinder, and the golden contents of the pie are warranted not to tarnish after this fiery ordeal by coming in contact with the atmosphere.

I next follow the golden annealed blanks to

the Blanching Room, where they are put into a cold-water bath to render them cool; after which they are washed in a hot weak solution of sulphuric acid and water, to remove all traces of surface impurity. Finally, after another wash in pure water, they are conveyed to a drying-stove, where they are first agitated violently in a heated tube, then turned into a sieve, and tossed about out of sight amongst a heap of beech-wood sawdust, kept hot upon an oven. After this playful process they are sifted into the upper world once more, and then transferred to trays, like butchers' trays, which are conveyed to the Stamping Room.

The Coining Press Room contains eight screw-presses, worked from above by invisible machinery. Below, there is a cast-iron platform; and above, huge fly arms, full six feet long, and weighty at their ends, which travel noisily to and fro, carrying with them the vertical screw, and raising and depressing the upper die. In front of each press, when the machinery is in motion, a boy is sitting to fill the feeding-tube with the bright plain dumps of gold that have come from the sawdust in the Blanching Room. On the bed of the press is fixed one of Mr. Wyon's head dies—a perfect work of art that is manufactured in the building; and the self-acting feeding apparatus—a slide moving backwards and forwards, much the same as in the delicate weighing machines—places the golden

dumps, one by one, on the die. The boy in attendance now starts some atmospheric pressure machinery, by pulling a starting line; the press and upper die are brought down upon the piece of unstamped gold that is lying on the lower die, along with a collar that is milled on its inner circumference, and which closes upon the coin with a spring, preventing its undue expansion, and at one forcible but well-directed blow the blank dump has received its top, bottom, and side impression, and has become a perfect coin of the realm. The feeder advances with steady regularity, and while it conveys another dump to the die, it chips the perfect sovereign down an inclined plane; the upper machinery comes down again; the dump is covered out of sight, to appear in an instant as a coin; other dumps advance, are stamped, are pushed away, and their places immediately taken. Some sovereigns roll on one side instead of going over to the inclined plane, others lie upon the edge of the machinery, or under the butcher's tray that holds the dumps, and the boys take even less notice of them than if they were so many peppermint drops; the heavy mass of black iron-work all over the room keeps moving steadily from ceiling to floor; a second, and all that a Dorsetshire labourer is worth in a year, is sent rolling carelessly about the platform; a dozen seconds, and all the same Dorsetshire labourer will ever earn in this world is following

the treasures that went before; five minutes, and the purchase-money is created of a landed estate; a quarter of an hour, and you may form some idea how easily fortunes are made; an hour, and any banker would give a partnership for the sweepings of the trays; a quarter of a day, and Daniel Dancer would have danced about in the madness of joy; a day, and he would have had to have been removed by the soldiers on duty at the point of the sword.

The workmen collect these different heaps of sovereigns and brush up the scattered money, that the joint product of metal, advanced mechanism, and careful art, may pass its last examination before it is sent into the outer world for circulation as perfect, unexceptionable coin. The metal has passed no locked doorway in its progress without being weighed out of one department into another, and it undergoes yet one more weighing before it is placed into bags for delivery to the Bank of England or private bullion holders, and consigned to a stone and iron strong-room, containing half a million of coined money, until the hour of its liberation draws nigh. As I saw the workmen tossing the precious burden about in copper scales, and taking pinches of bright new sovereigns in their hands with no more respect than if they were white-heart cherries at twopence a pound, I could

not help thinking that familiarity must breed contempt, and that the weighers will run through their property, when they come into it, with quite as much spirit as the most celebrated bloods about town.

PITY A POOR BRIDGE.

I BELIEVE that, by this time, the public is pretty familiar with me; if not, I know this, that I am pretty familiar with the public. I have carried them on my back now for eight and twenty years, and my ancestors have carried them for more than eight centuries. My ancestors were the old roadways across the river Thames, known as Old London Bridge, while I am the same roadway (about one hundred feet westward of the site of the other) known as New London Bridge. My ancestors were relieved (by an act of Parliament in seventeen hundred and sixty, and by several fires at divers times) of various encumbrances in the shape of houses and water-works; while I, in this present scorching month of July,* am having my back mended after a severe course of heavy and crowded work, and am waiting for something to turn up that may improve my prospects and condition.

There is no doubt about it, that I am shamefully overworked, and no gentleman knows this better than Mr. Daniel Whittle Harvey, the City Police Commissioner. He has done everything

* 1859.

that an active gentleman could do, by separating the carriage traffic over my back into fast and slow —light and heavy—two lines running one way, and two the other, but he cannot perform a miracle. I may not be very long, and I am certainly not very broad, but I am the most overloaded thoroughfare in the whole world, for all that. It was all very well—at least comparatively well—before those bustling South-Eastern, South Coast, and North Kent railway termini began to lay their heads together, near the hospital that was providentially placed at my southern base. Then I did enjoy an occasional calm, and what, I suppose, I must consider only a fair amount of burdens; but from that day of steam encroachment, my tranquillity was at an end. For the last ten years there has been such a frightful increase of persons passing through the London-bridge station alone, that what numbered six hundred and twenty-four thousand travellers in eighteen hundred and forty-eight, has reached thirteen millions and a-half in eighteen hundred and fifty-eight.

Everybody seems desirous of riding or walking across my back, and it puzzles me sometimes to discover what they can find to travel for. It seems to me that there must be much more comfort and wisdom in sitting still, or dabbling with your feet in the water (like I do), than in walking over the red-hot stones, under the unchecked glare

of a tropical sun, or trusting yourself to the mercy of a capricious horse, or the guidance of a daring driver. The public seem, however, to be of quite another way of thinking; an average day of four and twenty hours, during the present year (1859), will witness one hundred and sixty-eight thousand persons passing across me, from either side: one hundred and seven thousand on foot, and sixty-one thousand in vehicles.

These vehicles (during the same average day of twenty-four hours) number twenty thousand four hundred and ninety-eight, including fifty-four horses that are led or ridden. The same vehicle may, and does, pass over many times in the course of the day, as well as the same passenger, turning these figures into the simple record of bridge journeys; but that, I apprehend, makes little difference to me. A man is a man, for all that, and a hop-waggon is still a hop-waggon.

The waggons and carts in this endless procession number nine thousand and a quarter; the "other vehicles"—unclassable trucks of passage—reach nearly two thousand and a half; the cabs are close upon four thousand five hundred, and the omnibuses are four thousand two hundred and eighty-six.

With regard to these omnibuses alone, they struggle up like members returned to represent the outskirts of London in some great central City parliament. They belong to what may be called

two divisions—the railway traffic and the through traffic—that is, omnibuses which pass over my back simply for the railway station, and others that pass over it on their road to distant suburbs.

What have I done to Paddington that Paddington should worry me so? Fifty-three omnibuses come from that not very interesting part of London every day, making twelve double journeys each, by the way of Holborn, and crossing and recrossing me five hundred and sixty-six times. This is not even much more than half enough to satisfy that active and populous suburb; for another deputation of thirty-nine Paddington omnibuses favours me with three hundred and ninety crossings every day, by the way of the Strand; and another deputation of eight, with eighty crossings, by the way of the New Road and Finsbury.

Next comes merry Islington, with its twenty omnibuses, making two hundred and forty crossings a-day. Then follows that invisible forest, St. John's Wood (as if its neighbour, Paddington, had not done enough!) with twenty-three of the same vehicles, making two hundred and thirty crossings. They call themselves City Atlases, although I *bear* their weight, and they have probably some Irish idea that the account is balanced because they carry their passengers.

Hammersmith, with its twenty-six omnibuses, pays me two hundred and eight of these unsolicited

visits every day, and its opposite suburb, Bayswater, is not far behind it. Fourteen omnibuses from this latter place cross me one hundred and forty times, by the way of Holborn; and seven more, by the way of the Strand, are able to swell the list with another fifty-six crossings.

Brompton—the gay and salubrious Brompton—is represented by eighteen omnibuses, which perform their one hundred and eighty crossings a-day; and the more remote Putney, with its twenty-one omnibuses, is only able to reach one hundred and sixty-eight crossings.

Distance, in this case, lends a little improvement to the view, and a little more in the case of Acton and Ealing. These last-named places, with their five omnibuses, cross me twenty times a-day, and close the account of my special railway traffic with a daily total of two thousand two hundred and seventy-eight single journeys.

The next thing that worries me in connection with omnibuses, is the through traffic.

Kingsland and Newington must start forty-nine of these vehicles, which ride daily over my back six hundred and eighty-six times; Peckham and Camberwell are represented by twenty-five conveyances, which appear two hundred and fifty times; Brixton keeps close to these with twenty-four omnibuses, which make two hundred and forty single journeys; and Clapham, Balham Hill, and Tooting, by join-

ing together, come in next in the race, showing two hundred and thirty crossings, with twenty-three vehicles.

The Old Kent Road has very ancient claims upon my roadway, and they are received by fourteen omnibuses, which punish me with one hundred and ninety-six daily visits. Greenwich I cannot object to on the score of insufficient acquaintance, and I amiably tolerate forty single journeys a-day, performed by five of these conveyances, notwithstanding the existence of the railway.

Deptford and Rotherhithe are represented by two omnibuses, that make sixteen single journeys a-day; and Wandsworth, which I have no sympathy with, is satisfied with exactly the same traffic facilities.

The last place that imposes upon my good-nature in the matter of omnibuses, is Lewisham, which crosses me, with one vehicle, six times a-day, and winds up the list of crossings, with another total of sixteen hundred and eighty. This being added to the other total, gives a round sum of nearly four thousand crossings, which is what I have to bear daily from metropolitan and suburban omnibuses, in addition to my many other burdens.

My period of comparative rest from my miscellaneous trafficmongers is from two o'clock to five o'clock in the early morning, and my periods of particular frenzy are from nine o'clock, A.M., to seven o'clock, P.M. At ten o'clock in the morning, I

can count, in one hour, nearly thirteen thousand five hundred foot and carriage passengers passing across me, besides nearly eighteen hundred vehicles; and during the hour ending at five o'clock in the afternoon, I am compelled to bear twelve thousand passengers, mixed, as before, and seventeen hundred miscellaneous vehicles. This is being put upon with a vengeance!

I often amuse myself by watching my tormentors, guessing where they have come from, and where they are going to; admiring some of the pedestrians, and some of the cargoes in the waggons, and taking as little notice as possible of others, for obvious reasons. I have a particular aversion to "knackers'" carts (although I see plenty of them), because the legs of the dead horse hang out at one end and his head at the other, like the legs and head of a Patagonian gentleman who has got into a little boy's bed. I have no love for those waggons that carry skins from the different slaughter-houses to the Bermondsey scraping and drying-grounds, especially in the middle of a very hot summer's day—the cargo floats about too much in its open carriage to please me; but perhaps I am over-fastidious. It is far more agreeable to look upon a fresh country waggon laden with hay, and bearing on its summit a brown-faced boy, who is lying at full length on his stomach, chewing a straw.

There are waggons full of round cannon-ball

Dutch cheeses, purple as plums; waggons loaded with brown treacly-oozing sugar-casks, faithfully attended by a few wasps, and a good many flies; heavy brewers' drays filled with large jolting casks, and driven by drowsy giants in flannel costume, who sit asleep upon the shafts. There are strong timber-waggons, piled with heavy yellow planks, like a riverside wharf; there are coal waggons laden with black sacks and driven by black drivers; and there are flour waggons laden with white sacks, and driven by white drivers. There are waggons full of carboys of vitriol, casting a pungent odour about them as they go; waggons full of casks of oil, smelling like Vauxhall when the lamps have burnt out; waggons, like moving mountains, crawling under the heavy weight and towering height, of half a hundred full hop-sacks.

Now and then, the slow-moving, small-windowed, smoking-chimneyed fair waggon appears to swell the ceaseless procession; and the gilded carriage of a lord mayor or a City sheriff. Sometimes I am permitted to gaze upon the very last of the hackney coaches, which still plies for family hire at the South-Eastern railway terminus, and a four-horse stage-coach still determined to beat the parliamentary train, or perish in the ambitious attempt.

Dust-carts claim their right to a passage across my overloaded back, in company with innumerable travellers' traps that are painted with sham doors

and windows, to look like carriages filled with the aristocracy, instead of with ribbons, shawls, and lace. Small pony-gigs are observed, conducted by timid drivers, who wish they had taken a less frequented highway; and fast tandem dog-carts, coming from some livery stable near the Stock Exchange, and going to a whitebait dinner at Greenwich.

There are waggons, again, full of brown sides of bacon, lying in the straw, and looking like mattresses; waggons full of steaming grains, or dark cocoa-looking tan; and carts full of large birch-brooms which stick out on each side, and sweep the windows of the vehicles as they pass.

Here all desperate omnibus rivalry ceases, all "nursing" is unknown, and for five minutes, at least, the weary opposition conveyance is at rest. Each vehicle takes its allotted place, according to its turn, in its allotted "fast" or "slow" groove, governed by the dusty policemen on duty, who stand in the middle of the road.

Trucks drawn by donkeys, and filled with heavy costermongers, returning home after their day's sales are concluded, mingle with other trucks, full of square patches of peat, and drawn by boys, or full of toys, in which strange faces of wooden figures peep from between the rails, and painted wooden soldiers lie helplessly on their backs, like dead warriors after a battle.

Country drays, from small country ale breweries, appear with curtains at their sides, which look like hammock fittings on board ship; and waggons, filled with empty baskets, glide along from the Borough or Covent Garden Market, while their light but lofty cargo sways on high like the leaning tower of Pisa, or the spire of Chesterfield Church.

The humble wheel-barrow is not unrepresented in the procession, any more than the child's perambulator (going home quite new), or the slender, fragile, spider-like velocipede.

Shining prison-vans, driven and conducted by policemen, sometimes give a variety of interest to the show; and also dingy, letter-empty post-office vehicles, with their doors flying open, and their dark interiors turned into a free-and-easy omnibus by half-a-dozen bold and ragged boys.

Fat men squeeze themselves, by pairs, into narrow Hansom cabs, and roll over my back, with their perspiring, shiny, uncovered heads protruding from the hooded front of the vehicle.

Ladies pass over me in neat little broughams, to stockbrokers, bankers, dividend-offices, and visits; dozing, apoplectic men, whose heavy heads are buried in their bulging shirt-fronts, roll by in feather-bed fitted chariots; servants pass over in four-wheel cabs, on their road to a new place, with their faces looking very anxious, and the whole of their worldly goods exposed on the roof of their

conveyance; pleasure-vans are seen in the throng, filled with equal layers of men's hats and women's bonnets, and watched over by a gentleman, who stands upon the steps, and disturbs the business reveries of the passers-by, by playing on the cornopean.

Joyous boys are being brought from school, with fishing-rods and cricket-bats sticking out of the windows of their carriages; and melancholy boys are being taken back to school, looking very sick and miserable in their threadbare cab corners.

Pale invalids are being supported in carriages by anxious friends, who are conveying them to some last hope of infirmity, where the winds of heaven are said to blow less roughly; and rollicking sailors are balancing themselves on the top of bedding placed upon the top of their overloaded cabs on their way to Portsmouth, to join their outward bound vessels.

The foot-passengers, who are never forbidden to crowd upon me, even when I am under repair, are often loaded in a way that adds materially to my burden. Baskets, carpet-bags, portmanteaus, reticules, walking-sticks, umbrellas, bird-cages, dogs, and fish-baskets, I may fairly expect; but pick-axes, shovels, warming-pans, chests of drawers, window-blinds, and a variety of other similar things are carried to increase my torment. Nearly every overloaded vehicle is driven on my road, and nearly

every overloaded porter or errand-boy is sent across my footway. Taking the number of persons as well as the vehicles that pass across me in the course of the year, the delays and loss of time they suffer, and the value to them of the time they lose, I have often endeavoured to arrive at the money-cost of the obstructive annoyance on my back. It seems to me that the national debt is a mere milk-score in comparison.

The government that rules over me is the stern government of Move-on; but accidents will occur, even on the best regulated bridges. Stray dogs will be run over, horses will tumble down, or hop-waggons will give way; and the latter event is a thing that at once makes itself felt through all the main thoroughfare arteries of London.

One annoyance I am happily spared by my tormentors, though only from a purely selfish consideration. A stately funeral, making its pompous way from Finsbury to Norwood Cemetery, never attempts, for a moment, to encumber my unfortunate back; but seeks a more congenial passage through the black and silent cloisters of the iron bridge of Southwark. I am afraid that such an extra procession, however costly and imposing, would stand but little chance of being treated with becoming respect, especially if it made its appearance on my road in the busy part of the four and twenty hours.

What can I do to obtain out-door relief? What can my guardians do to relieve me?

It was of no use placing that fat statue of that harmless king upon that slender pedestal at my northern end, making the fourth William stand like an omnibus time-keeper to watch my struggling traffic, and smile complacently upon my torment. It was of no use placing that fragment of a parish church-steeple, sprouting out of the sewer at my southern end, to carry a clock, which only tends to madden the passengers, by showing them what time they are still losing—what time they have already lost. As well might my stone parapets be adorned with the choicest examples of fresco-painting; my muddy seat-niches—those little footway-harbours of refuge—be filled with smooth-faced statuettes, and planted with beds of flowers.

My railway termini tormentors are praiseworthily striving to remove themselves and their traffic by an extension of their line to Charing Cross, and let no man dare to stand in their way, on any pretence whatever.

This is something, but it is not all.

It is not the duty of a government to do many things that it does do—not even to build its own ships, or make its own guns, at a heavy annual loss—but it is the duty of a government to provide important bridge roadways. My black neighbour, the iron bridge of Southwark, was built some forty

years ago, at a cost of eight hundred thousand pounds, and its proprietors, I should think, would be glad to sell it for half the money. How often has a much greater sum been wasted in the "estimates" of a single year, or melted in dishonest, unearned, and injurious "pensions?"

Must I wait for even such a simple reform as this, until the worst constitutional monarch and the best director of roadways of his day, has fulfilled his supposed destiny by conquering England?

FIRST-FLOOR WINDOWS.

I AM not one of those impertinent modern devils upon two sticks—the men upon stilts. I am not a window-cleaner (fearful trade!), a house-painter, nor a performer on the acrobatic "perch," but simply an omnibus traveller through the London streets, who always prefers to sit outside. I spend much time and money on the top of these useful vehicles, and I never attempt to secure the box-seat. I never smoke, and I have, therefore, no cigars to offer to the driver; I know nothing of horses, and my conversational powers are, therefore, too limited for a box-seat passenger. My place is the knife-board; and there I sit, watching those two intelligent eyes of every passing household—the first-floor windows—not offensively, I hope: not pryingly, I know: but lazily, and, perhaps, reflectively, like a boy who jolts into London from some pleasant country road in summer, lying face downwards on a carted bed of tares.

From this position I have seen you, fattest of fat men, dweller in that old English fifteenth century house, with the pointed roof, in one of the main thoroughfares. I have watched you on a sultry

June morning, perhaps, before business hours, squeezed through that small, overhanging first-floor window, smoking that heavy meerschaum-pipe, whose bowl hung dangling almost upon the hats of the passers-by. I have gazed upon you as you leaned forward, without any regard to the antique building that sustained you, until I thought the whole bulging fabric would have fallen, in powdered feebleness, into the street. The small low hutch, or shop, immediately under your folded arms, in whose doorway a little child could scarcely stand upright, has sunk in on one side, like a hat that has been sat upon in a railway carriage. Is it with the weight of your vast bulk? For so it appears to me.

How often, too, have I seen you, rosy-cheeked shop-boy, standing upon the leaden ledge of that shop to clean these first-floor windows? Why is the little maid-of-all-work (and no play) sent to clean the inside of the glass, while you are polishing the outside? Is it out of kindness to give her some glimpses of a holiday? Of course, the task is a long while in hand, and many customers' parcels below are waiting to be taken out; for window-cleaning, by two such labourers, includes a good deal of face-making and face-dodging through the glass, besides a little romping and flirtation. The wash-leather drops (quite accidentally) into the street, and has to be picked up by another boy, who enviously watches the whole proceedings from the

pavement below. Perhaps he is a rival suitor for the hand of the young Cinderella above, who looks upon him, with her nose flattened against the window-pane. Crash goes the glass, as a matter of course, and the timid youth in the street decamps like a young deer. Will the faithful swain on the shop-ledge take the blame boldly upon himself, and be haunted by a phantom tenpence which is always going to be stopped out of his wages? Perhaps.

How many first-floor windows have I seen that are covered with large effigies of teapots, dustpans, and Wellington boots? Trade is a wise, a profitable, and an honourable thing; but it ought to be confined to the shop. If I took tea in drawing-rooms over tea-warehouses, hardware-warehouses, and boot-warehouses, I should not like to see the shadow of some great property emblem of my entertainer's trade cast across the table, while the substance obscured, at once, the prospect and the light. Next to a shark, or some other sea-monster, peeping into my cabin porthole, I should object to a gigantic dustpan, or a body-bath, across my first-floor window.

I have often passed by that large chapel-like first-floor window over a tavern, and well I know to what it leads. Long-room, or club-room: faded piano in corner, horsehair seats all round the wall; smell of beer and tobacco; sawdust and sand; crossed pipes on tables; canopy at the end (like

the theatrical tent of Richard the Third on Bosworth Field), the seat of the Perpetual Grand President of the United Order of Provident Tipplers. Prudence is good in fathers of families, especially when influencing a taste for gin-and-water. There is something dry and sepulchral about savings' banks. Nothing like a tavern fund, with a tavern treasurer, and tavern conviviality over the periodical payments, —to diminish the savings.

A short length of aristocratic by-street and canaries swinging in cages, give place to window conservatories, aquariums, small household jungles; pretty little boxes of imported Nature made to order in a pretty artificial manner, like a waterfall at a public exhibition. All the life in the street is shut out by shrubs in which snakes may have crept, and through which no vulgar, inquiring gaze can penetrate. No matter. Pass on to the next.

A sulky, frowning individual is standing, with his hands in his pockets, full between the snow-flaked muslin curtains, lowering at the world. There may be a skeleton of temper in this particular house; but it is hardly wise to dance its bony legs in public.

Take a lesson from your next door neighbour, whose feelings are soothed by playing upon the harp; as he seems to tell us by displaying the instrument so fully in the window. Past several China jars, between rich ruby curtains; past another conservatory, thinly planted, in which the Hon. Mr.

Romeo is paying his received attentions to the Hon. Miss Juliet; and a sudden turn of the vehicle plunges us amidst another layer of first-floor windows.

Still the same sick paralyzed child, whose bed has been behind that curtain for so many years; whose face never seems to grow any larger, and who is always playing, in summer, with that parched and sun-dried box of mignionette. Still the same vacant, gaping empty rooms to let, through which you can see the walls in the close yards at the back. Still the same slovenly, broken, lop-sided Venetian blinds, barely covering the dirty windows, which open on rooms whose picture it is not difficult to draw. Threads upon the floor, saucepans upon the hearth-rugs, kettles upon the tables, women in curl-papers in the afternoon, and generally nothing but yellowness, dirt, and rags. One change has come over the first-floor windows of the street, and that is where a new inhabitant—a refugee—sticking up a board in his cheap apartments, announcing that he teaches Syriac, coolly intimates his desire to be starved to death.

Another turn of the vehicle, and we are in a leading thoroughfare once more.

How many tradespeople has royalty appointed, from time to time, and empowered to raise the national coat-of-arms between their first-floor windows? And, when raised, do they make the gooseberries larger, the meat sweeter, the bread

purer? One house of business that boasts this mark of distinguished patronage is proud of concealing every sign of its trade. Not a shred, not a patch, not an atom of anything shows itself either in the first-floor windows or any others. There is no name over the doorway to distinguish the house from a club-house, a public institution, a government office, a place for weighing money or trying guns, a Trinity-house (whatever that may be), or even a family mansion of sober aspect. Looking more closely at the building, you see the name of "Benbows" in small letters, and that is all the vulgar publicity which this distinguished house requires. It is its pride to be known as Benbows—nothing more. If any dwellers in England are not acquainted with Benbows, they argue themselves unknown. I have just heard that Benbows is an upholsterer. Thank you.

That is a quiet first-floor window, with its neat short Venetian blinds (like a window in a clean Dutch picture), where the bust of Galen looks down complacently upon a nursemaid showing the passing coaches to a sturdy infant. Below, there is plenty of brimstone and treacle to last the child its life, for its father is a chemist; and, though some people may affect to call him a poor apothecary (after Shakespeare), his profits are greater than many surgeons', and his sitting-rooms have all the prim severity of a physician's study.

How often have I passed and repassed you, serenest and stoutest of womankind, to find you growing more stout and more serene every time I see you? You have retired from business which is very wise; but still you sit over it, which is wiser still. While the human ants are busy in your thriving hosier's shop below, while you can hear the profitable tramp of feet, and even the chink of money on the counters, you have nothing to do but to watch the street traffic, and devour the periodical literature of your country. Of course you took your late husband's foreman into partnership, which accounts for the "Co." that is added to the familiar name, and for the leisure you are enjoying as the representative of capital.

Past those dusty ground-glass windows that hide the stooping law-writers; past first-floor windows full of shirt-collars; past others full of strange-shaped monsters that are made of india-rubber, and warranted waterproof; past others full of gigantic toys that drive young passengers frantic, and large open-mouthed masks through which the professional pantomimist must surely leap, in spite of the whole available body of real policemen; past the watchmaker's over a pastrycook's, where a number of grave-looking men are peeping through the shortest of telescopes, apparently watching the tart-eaters below; past what looks like a public picture-gallery, but which is a fine art sale-room;

and past a first-floor window, standing between two polished columns of the colour of raspberry jam, high up above the opposite house-tops.

Down again from this long-legged looking specimen of the revived Babylonian, or trading palatial style of architecture, to an accessible first-floor window of a common barber's shop, wherein is the living picture of the lathered lamb awaiting the sacrifice. The operator is sharpening his razor on a hanging strap that is near the window, and is telling that old, old story, of which the weather forms the most noticeable part.

How often have I seen that young Juliet at No. 4, and that young Romeo at No. 5, sitting, back to back, in adjoining houses; each reading a book, and each unconscious of the other's presence; both evidently formed for each other, and yet never destined to come together; each going down the narrow, separate pathways of life, that never meet, and yet being only divided by a two-foot brick wall.

The first-floor windows of my theatre make me melancholy, because they lie at the back, and are always filled with wretched fragments of paper, boards, and scenery, instead of glass.

The first-floor window of my parish church (the first-floor over the gravestones) never pleases me on a working-day, because I look through the dingy glass (we have a horror of coloured devices at our

establishment), and see a female pew-opener standing in the pulpit, dusting the feather-bed cushions, and a common charwoman mopping the ten commandments.

The first-floor windows of my workhouse—that is, the workhouse which I help to support by paying heavy poor's-rates—always annoy me, because, at whatever hour of the night or morning I happen to pass them, they are lighted up with costly gas throughout the whole length and breadth of the building, as if for some great midnight orgie.

CABS.

FROM my earliest youth I was taught to regard cabmen as birds of prey. I was led to consider that their hands were against every man, and every man's hand ought to be against them in self-defence. I was forbidden to attribute their husky voices to anything but unlimited indulgence in common spirituous liquors. The red noses that I saw peeping from under broad-brimmed hats, and over bee-hive-looking caped great coats, were never said in my hearing to arise from exposure to the weather. When I was sent on a solitary journey—perhaps to school—in a four-wheeled hackney-coach or cab, I always heard a stern voice bargaining with the driver before I was placed inside; and I looked upon him, through the small window in front, during the short intervals when I was not being jerked from corner to corner of the far too spacious vehicle, as a dangerous ogre who might leap down and devour me at any moment.

When I grew up to attain the gay, thoughtless position of a young man about town, I lost my fear of the wild cab-driver, and found no amusement so agreeable as that of playing upon his weaknesses.

My favourite plan at night was to affect the appearance of the most idiotic intoxication, and, when I had drawn half a dozen eager charioteers around me, to select one, in such a manner that he might suppose he had got a helpless productive fare. On arriving at my destination, of course I left the vehicle with the steadiest of steps and the soberest of aspects, to present him with his exact charge, as regulated by Act of Parliament.

In due time I became a married man, and discarded for ever these youthful freaks of fancy. My early teaching with regard to the utter badness of all cabmen had not disappeared, and I still treated them with moderate severity. I never pampered them with bonuses over their legal fares; and I learned every distance as if I had been an Ordnance Surveyor. I still looked upon them as untamed, devouring creatures, who hung upon the skirts of society, and I was prepared to impress this view upon my children, as my guardians had impressed it upon me. Before, however, I had an opportunity of doing this, my sentiments underwent a marked change.

My wife, accompanied by a servant, and our first-born, an infant, aged three months, had started, one November afternoon, to visit a relative at the other side of London. The day was misty, but when the evening came the whole town was filled with a dense fog, as thick as soup. I gave them

up at an early hour, never supposing that they would attempt to break through the black smoky barrier, and accomplish a journey of nearly nine miles. In this I was mistaken, for towards eleven o'clock the door-bell rang, and they presented themselves muffled-up like stage-coachmen. The account I received was, that a four-wheel cab had been found, that they had been three hours and a-half upon the road, that the cabman had walked nearly the whole way with a lamp at the head of his horse, and that he was now outside awaiting payment.

I felt a powerful struggle going on within me. The legislature had fixed the price of cab-work at two shillings an hour, or sixpence a mile, but it had said nothing about snow-storms, fluctuations in the price of provender, or November fogs. There was no contract between my wife and the cabman, and she had not engaged him by the hour; so that, protected by the Act of Parliament, I might have sent out four-and-sixpence for the nine miles' ride, by the servant, and have closed the door securely against the driver. Actuated, perhaps, as much by curiosity as a sense of justice, I did not do this, but ordered the man in, and gave him the dangerous permission to name his own price. He was a middle-aged driver, with a sharp nose, and when he entered the room, he placed his hat upon the floor, and seemed a little bewildered by the novelty of his situation.

"If I am to, I am," he said, "but I'd much rather leave it to you, sir."

"This is a journey," I replied, "hardly within the meaning of the Act, and whatever you charge I will cheerfully pay."

"Well," he said, with much deliberation, "I don't think five shillin's ought to hurt you?"

"I don't think it ought," I returned, astonished at this moderate demand,* "nor yet seven-and-sixpence, or eight shillings. You can't be a regular cabman?"

My visitor pulled his badge from under his great-coat at this remark, not quite understanding the drift of it.

"I mean," I said, explaining the remark, "that you've not driven a cab long."

"Only thirty years, that's all."

"You must know something of the business, then?"

"Had ought to, by this time," he replied.

"Take a glass of something warm," I said, "and tell me all about it."

My visitor was very willing to accept my invitation, and I soon saw him seated comfortably before me.

"Cabmen," he began, "are neither worse than anybody else, nor yet better. There's good and bad amongst 'em, like in a basket of eggs; and

* This is a fact within the experience of the writer.

there must be nearly eleven thousand of them, according to the badges issued. The first thing cabmen have got to do is to find a cab, and here they've got a pick of about ten thousand. P'raps three thousand of these cabs are 'Hansoms,' and all the rest four-wheelers; but as some of the men work at night, and others in the day, all the cabs are not on the road, and only six thousand, perhaps, are paying duty as licensed carriages. Some of these have got what we call the six-day plate, and they only run for six days. Others have got the seven-day plate, and they're Sunday cabs. The plate costs a sovereign, which we call the 'one pound racket,' and the duty is a shilling a-day extra. We used to pay five pound for the plate, and two pound duty, in one lump. All this money goes to Gover'ment. Well, as I said before, the first thing cabmen have got to do is to find a cab, and they haven't got to look amongst many proprietors. All the cabs are in very few hands—I needn't mention names—and the owners do pretty well what they like with the drivers. Of course a man needn't drive a cab unless he likes, but lots of them do like, and something must be done to get a living. The young fellows take a great fancy to the 'Hansoms,' because they look smart, and run easy. Their high wheels push 'em on, while the low four-wheeler always drags. As to their earnings, that depends. A Hansom is very good in fine weather;

and during April, May, and June, before the people begin to go out of town, they do very well at road-work. They're of no use for families and heavy railway work, and the regular Hansom cabman hardly understands ladies and children. They make money at what we call 'mouching' and 'putting on,' which means loitering along the roads, and playing about a club-house, or some large building. Some of the police are very sharp upon this game, and the driver gets summoned before he knows where he is. The driver of a Hansom has to earn fourteen or sixteen shillings a-day in summer for his owner, besides paying his 'yard-money'" (stable charges), "about four shillings, before he begins to pick up anything for himself.

"A four-wheeler is let to a driver for about twelve shillings a-day, and he has to pay all expenses. The best work these get is at theatres and railways, and they go on for the day at nine in the morning to run till eleven at night, being allowed two horses. Their best day is one with a fine morning and a wet afternoon. The people come out and are caught. If the day begins wet, it's bad for the cabs. The night cabs go on at seven or eight at night, working till seven or eight in the morning, and they're allowed only one horse, or what the owner makes do for one. Of course it's often only a bellows on four legs, and those not very substantial. The owner seldom makes any

allowance for the difference in horses—you take 'em as they come; and he knows pretty well how much work can be got out of them.

"When we go to the yard to begin work in the morning, we deposit our licenses as security for the cabs and horses. Some of the men, who're very anxious to start as drivers, or who want work, are compelled to sign contracts; and when they do this, they bind themselves to pay all damages that may be done to their horses or cabs. They either pay these by instalments, or thirty or forty men in a yard will make a fund amongst themselves for accidents, which they call 'box-money.'

"We drive out, and choose our stand from fancy, providing it's not full. A stand musn't have more than twenty cabs on it at one time, and it's watched over by a police waterman, who gets fifteen shillings a-week and his clothes. If a cab-man takes a place on a stand after it's full, we say he's 'fouled' it, and he's liable to be summoned. The worst court they can take him to is Bow Street. If a month's imprisonment can be given, he gets it there, or he has to pay a heavier fine."

"He can always avoid this," I said, observing that my visitor had come to a pause, "if he conducts himself properly."

"So he can," returned my visitor, "but the public often appears at the same place. If a cab-man sometimes overcharges a passenger, a passenger

quite as often underpays a cabman. We've started protection clubs amongst us, with measuring wheels, and we sometimes make the secretaries measure and sue for the balance of fares. We find ladies the worst passengers. They're timid and obstinate, and run into houses, and send out servants. When the passenger is summoned he is said to have made a mistake; but the cabman is always pulled up for fraud. He earns his pound or five and twenty shillings every week, and is quite as likely to be as respectable and honest as any other workman who gets the same money. He's all right enough, if people wouldn't regulate him so much. There's the street police regulating him; the police watermen regulating him; and the Gover'ment regulating him by saying what price he's to charge for his work. This sets everybody a-thinking he must be awful bad, and a benevolent society of gentlemen has just started up, who want to regulate him still more by giving him what they call 'Cabmen's Clubs.' There's one club at Paddington, one at Millbank, another at Newington Butts, and another at King's Cross. They talk of others at Chelsea and Whitechapel.* The one I've been to most is at King's Cross, and I don't like it, because it's too far away from my stand. They've taken an old public-house in a back street, and they've scooped it out until hardly anything else is left but the

* October, 1859.

pillars that hold up the roof. A lot of forms are placed along the bare floor, making the place look like a school; and the library seems to me to have very few what I call amusing books. I don't like to see handbills lying about, at the top of which is printed, 'The Cabman's Dying Cry;' and the whole place seems to be cold and uncomfortable. The rules may be very good, and the people that started these 'clubs' may be very good, but it strikes me they don't quite understand cabmen. We've got a deal to put up with, and try our tempers. The owners pull at us on one side, and the public's always shaking the Act of Parli'ment at us on the other. Sometimes we're dragged off the very front of the stand—a place that's worth money—and all for what? Sixpence! Some one wants to go round the muddy corner in thin boots, and so off we come, according to regulations. If we try to do the best we can for ourselves, and look out for a long fare, with two extra passengers, people shout after us as if we'd picked somebody's pockets."

"If you accept a cab," I interrupted, "you accept it with all its rules and conditions."

"So we do," returned my visitor; "and pretty close we keep to 'em. Take us altogether, the bad and the good, we don't often kick over the traces. Because we've got to loiter about for hours near our stand, in all weathers, we're none the worse for smoking a pipe, drinking a pint of beer, and some-

times slinking in to warm our hands at a tap-room fire. The gentlemen who start these 'Cabmen's Clubs' think we are; but while they try to improve us, they never interfere with the tradesmen in the public-house parlour. The 'clubs' provide us with tea, coffee, chops, and steaks, at the usual charges, but beer is not openly allowed on the premises. This may be all very well for men who're not at work; but, unless there was one 'club' close upon every stand, it can't be used by the cabmen on duty. Besides, a man wants beer, and it's wronging him, in my opinion, to say he don't. We go to the public-house, or coffee-house, if one happens to be near, for cabmen are quite as fond of coffee as decent mechanics. We use a good many comfortable coffee-shops that are like clubs, in different parts of London, and one especially, near Regent Street, filled with all kinds of books and papers. The books and papers at the 'Cabmen's Clubs' are not admitted until they've passed the committee, because the whole thing is supported by charity. This is another reason why I don't like it, although they tell me that seven hundred men have become members at the different stations. The 'penny bank' and the 'sick fund' may be all very well, because the member pays for all he gets; but the 'free tea' provided every Sunday afternoon always sticks in my throat. While I'm able to do my work and pay my way, I don't want anything given to

me. I aint a child. If the seven hundred members are not able to do this, they'd better say so, and either throw up driving, or get the sixpence a mile altered to eightpence."

At the close of this speech, as the hour was getting late, my visitor took his departure, having succeeded in making me take a more charitable view of the business and trials of cab-driving.

COMMITTED TO NEWGATE STREET.

It may have been a prophetic vision of the future, it may have been only the phantom of a disordered digestion, but I saw it as plainly as anything was ever seen by human eyes.

I saw the architectural masterpiece of Wren, the national Cathedral of St. Paul's, as black and as majestic as ever, up in the clouds. I say in the clouds, for the solemn glory had departed from its base. It was no longer a mysterious temple standing in a sacred circle, undefiled by contact with the coarse trades carried on within the broad shadow of its dome. The greasy, suety labourers of Newgate Market, and the dead meat—the daily staple food of metropolitan millions—had at last oozed out of their narrow receptacles in this direction. The thin, lean channel of Paternoster Row—the ground that is traditionally haunted by the bony authors of the past—had been too weak and feeble to stem that sturdy torrent, which refused to be confined any longer by any barriers, until it found a resting-place round the statue of Queen Anne in the open cathedral yard. The heavy quarters of Aberdeen beef, the pink and yellow quarters of Edinburgh

mutton, the bullocks' hearts, the ox-tails, the baskets of small joints, the carcases sewn up in dark canvas bags, the smooth-skinned pigs, were all piled up on the very steps of the temple, in defiance of everything, except the one necessity for finding room. The blue-shirted guardians of these treasures, the salesmen's men, and the market porters, looked hot, determined, sulky, and riotous, like persons who had made up their minds to be trifled with no more. The former ran their red fingers through their greasy hair, flourished their long greasy knives, and seemed to speak of the great space underneath the cathedral dome as if they were about to turn it, by force, into a market for dead meat. The Dean and Chapter were, fortunately, not awake to hear these seditious threats. The Common Council had debated for years, the City architect had reported for years, the City solicitor had drawn and reported for years, and, in the meantime, the metropolitan population had grown, had doubled, and the food supply had doubled likewise. Thousands of market-carts formed an endless chain along Newgate Street, the Old Bailey, Ludgate Hill, and the sacred churchyard. Thousands of tons of meat poured relentlessly from loaded waggons in Warwick Lane, White Hart Street, the market proper, and Newgate Street, squeezing through the narrow courts and alleys to the cathedral columns. Thousands of butchers hustled and bargained with hundreds of salesmen,

while hundreds of porters trotted by with mighty limbs of meat upon their backs, or with half a dozen knotted sheep quarters disposed about their bodies. In such a storm the voice of authority was hushed, the truncheon of authority was placed upon the shelf, and rum and milk were liberally combined to console the abdicated beadle and the abdicated policeman.

I awoke, as all dreamers do. I discovered that my watch had reached the hour of three A.M., while I recollected that I had appointed the hour of four A.M. to inspect, in reality, the market I had been visiting in my sleep. I am not in the habit of getting up at three; I am not in the habit of visiting Newgate Market. The sense of some strange, unusual duty had produced a short and restless night, in which the coming events had cast their exaggerated shadows before.

Not so very exaggerated, either, as I found, when the market delirium was at its height. At four o'clock in the morning there was comparative tranquillity, and partial darkness. It was Saturday, and a December morning. The hundred and fifty salesmen, with their six or seven hundred men, had not all arrived to open their shallow shops in the narrow Newgate Street lanes, and to welcome the arrival of two thousand purchasers. But the six hundred tons of dead meat had already begun to arrive from the different railways in heavy vans,

and signs of these deliveries might have been seen as early as one o'clock in the morning. Where the shops were not open, the heavy baskets of mutton were thrown on the pavement before the dark doorways, as the first rule for the carters to observe is to get rid of their load, and to get out of the way. By five A.M., the whole of the courts, alleys, shops, spaces, cupboards, and watchbox-looking counting-houses were lighted up; the arrivals of meat became more frequent, and the struggle to deliver more desperate; the thousand and one carts of the different metropolitan butchers took their places in a slanting position along the kerb of Newgate Street, round the black prison, in Paternoster Row, and Ave Maria Lane, up Ludgate Hill, and round the churchyard; and the business of the market might be considered as fairly opened as there is any prospect of its ever being in this world, while it remains where it is.

This business is tolerably simple in principle, and consists chiefly of selling consignments of dead meat, upon commission. There are a few carcase butchers—men who kill their own meat, and sell it—but not more than a dozen; there are eight or ten licensed slaughter-house keepers, with slaughter-houses not under ground, as in the olden time; and there are a few small salesmen, who join to a small commission trade, the purchasing and retailing of meat on their own account. These are the excep-

tions in Newgate Market, to whom may be added the poultry-dealers, who carry on their occupation in a small feathered space, not unlike a "Lady-chapel" in a cathedral. The meat is sold by the stone of eight pounds; a peculiar arbitrary weight, in use only in dead and live meat markets. The salesman is paid by a fixed commission on each sheep, pig, or bullock disposed of, and not by a per-centage upon the price obtained.

The dead meat consigned to Newgate Market for sale, consists entirely of the hind, or best parts of the animals; the fore parts being disposed of in the country—where the killing takes place—or in London, to provision merchants—by a separate operation—who use it for salting and making preserves. The bulk of the mutton comes from Edinburgh, in baskets containing ten hind parts of sheep apiece; the bulk of the beef is sent up from Aberdeen in huge quarters, protected by coarse canvas bags. As a curious instance of the unequal effect of railway competition, it may be mentioned that the charge for carriage per ton is greater from Bedford than from this remote northern city of Aberdeen. The difference in the quantities of consignments may have something to do with it, but there stands the bare fact.

When the meat has been tugged and forced out of its railway waggon, in the small, crowded, noisy market-place, or the narrow, crowded, noisy

street, it is seized by porters and salesmen's men and conveyed to its proper destination. The quarters of beef, looking like mattresses in their canvas coverings, are hoisted upon greasy backs, while the baskets of sheep are planted on small porters' barrows, and wheeled desperately in amongst the higgling, busy crowd. A ceaseless procession of this character is doomed to struggle for hours through the narrow groves of fat meat, always meeting another procession, whose destiny it is to struggle in the same manner, on the same precious ground, but in an exactly opposite direction. Proprietors of shops are pushed, nose foremost, against their meat; hats are knocked off by the hard, sharp feet of pigs; the dissection of beef flanks is discontinued for a time, and the long knife is dropped dexterously into a gaping pocket or pouch, that an unlucky stab may not be given in the wrong place; the dandy white coats of butcher "swells" (for there are taste and aristocracy even here) are larded well by huge suety bullock-quarters from which there is no escape; the back-porter shouts to you to take care of your head, and the barrow-porter requests you to mind your back; the badgered carter exclaims "Below!" immediately after he has tilted over half a ton of raw provisions within an inch of your feet; horses and carts are backed helplessly into blind alleys and squares, from which there seems no possible prospect of escape, and the one thing agreeable in all

this cramped and confined labour is the general good-humour and patience of the men. When the meat has struggled up to the shop of its appointed salesman, the baskets are rapidly opened, the canvas coverings are rapidly cut off, and a little greasy ticket is searched for amongst the straw, or inside the bag, which is the sole record of the name of the sender and the weight of the meat. Sometimes, these tickets, when the consigners are very careful, are found skewered into the body of each animal; sometimes, they are lost altogether, or, when found, are illegible from grease and bad writing; sometimes, the basket, when opened, is full of small joints of mutton and veal, each one of which belongs to a separate proprietor. These records are transferred to the small watchbox counting-houses, while the meat is quickly hung up on large hooks, in and outside the shops, for the immediate inspection of the numerous passing buyers. Every inch of space is made available in these shops; they are scooped out, so to speak; the encroachment of a water-pipe is grudged; and staircases, in some instances, are swept away, to have their places supplied by upright ladders nailed against the wall. The meat is hardly hoisted to the hooks, and the men have hardly had time to display their critical admiration of a quarter which possesses many points of beauty and excellence, when an early, decisive, or important buyer marches round the shop with a handful of

skewers, pinches the sheep, lifts up the beef to examine the quality at the end, and finally, by sticking a skewer in each animal, marks a score of favoured quarters as his own. The walls are quickly stripped again, the meat is weighed and charged to the buyer, and a struggle, similar to that which succeeded in landing it in the salesman's shop has to be immediately gone through to land it in the butchers' market carts. These carts may be in the Old Bailey, in Newgate Street, or Paternoster Row, according to their luck in securing a place, and thither the procession of meat porters has to wind and fight. Legs of pork are bumped against huge pieces of veal; bullocks' hearts and ox-tails are swung jauntily into butcher-boys' hands, while quarters of beef press onward, and send the weaker sheep to the wall, by reason of their superior momentum and weight. As they struggle out of the market, they meet another incoming procession of later deliveries, and the two solid streams pass each other as best they can. This kind of scene goes on every morning, for several hours, from four o'clock, perhaps, until ten A.M.; the most trying mornings being Saturday and Monday. Contractors, eating-house keepers, poulterers, and boys who sell meat-hooks, hatchets, knives, etc., mix with the crowd of butchers and salesmen; other boys worm their way about, with early copies of the morning papers; and little girls endeavour to convey to

hungry shopmen large mugs of hot coffee and thick slices of bread and cold pork. Old public-houses, which skulk in out-of-the-way corners, light up the lemons and rum phials in their dingy windows, and proceed to brew the favourite market beverage, rum and milk. Old coffee-houses, with signs appropriate to their position, which you saw, as plainly as possible, an hour before, are now hidden, up to their second floors, with hanging quarters of beef and mutton, and you grope for a door under a portico of headless sheep. Dwelling-houses look quietly down upon this whirlpool of raw food, and the dull, yellow-white blinds of their windows can be seen through the morning mist, and above the flare of the market gas. They must be wonderful people who can sleep in such bed-chambers.

It is not, perhaps, easy to overrate the social importance of this dead-meat market in Newgate Street. After allowing for the metropolitan live cattle market at Holloway, we may safely say—although the statistics are extremely loose—that the duty of providing one-half of the daily staple food of three millions of people is thrown upon the meat salesmen in these Newgate Street courts and alleys. We may not only assert that our present dead-meat market is painfully wanting in space, but that it contributes, in some degree, by the difficulties it throws in the way of the butcher's trade, to raise the price of animal food all over

London. The fact would be ridiculous, but for its having a serious aspect, that six hundred tons of meat, on any given Saturday morning, should be squeezed, pushed, and thrown, by some three thousand people, into a web of narrow alleys, like the maze at Hampton Court, to be torn and dragged out of the same maze by the same three thousand people immediately afterwards. To look at one of these alleys, when business is at its height, you might suppose that the houses had been slightly split asunder by solid wedges of meat.

The market proper, which belongs to the Corporation, is an open, uncovered space, about twenty-five yards long by twenty yards broad. It can be reached by a few foot passages, but only by one carriage-way, about three yards wide, called White Hart Street, that will admit one cart at a time out of Warwick Lane. Almost every van that comes down this narrow roadway has to be conducted by the market beadle to its place, and planted with much ingenuity, so that it may be able to withdraw when its unloading work is done. Nearly every Stoke Pogis in the country has a better market-place; while Liverpool can show a range of buildings for selling every article of human food much superior to what our chief metropolitan receptacles for fish, flesh, vegetables, and fowls would make, if they were all brought together. The different webs of this maze, the narrow alleys, the

shops that have burst out between Newgate Street —taverns, drapers, and Berlin-wool warehouses— the meat receptacles in Warwick Lane and Ivy Lane, are all private property; rented by meat salesmen, whose business could not be conducted any longer in the sheds of the market proper.

The old College of Physicians in Warwick Lane, built in 1670, from a design by Sir Christopher Wren, has been partially swallowed up by the butchers, in their irresistible demand for room. Looking at the octangular porch of entrance, under the "pill"-surmounted dome (according to the author of the "Dispensary"), and along the passages, which look like naves and transepts, to find them lighted up, hung with all kinds of meat, and crowded with meat buyers and meat sellers, it requires no very great stretch of faith or imagination to believe that St. Paul's Cathedral may one day fall a victim in like manner to market necessities, as it appeared in my dream. There was a time when no eminent physician could have thought, for a moment, that his cherished college would ever be so desecrated; and so, no doubt, at the present hour, think the Dean and Chapter of St. Paul's of their sacred temple. It is not wise to be over-confident in your security. Those who have any lingering regard for the old market-place of literature—Paternoster Row—and those who respect the sanctity of the national cathedral, either

from an architectural, theological, or ecclesiastical point of view, will do well in endeavouring to turn the ever-swelling tide of dead meat in an opposite direction, and in supporting the projectors who wish to transform Smithfield into a great central market for flesh, fish, and fowl. The maddening traffic of the City streets shows another necessity for some such improvement; while the contemplated centralization of the metropolitan railways ought to afford increased facilities for the more rapid and decent collection and distribution of food.

What the proposed and accepted design for covering in Smithfield may be I suppose we shall all learn in good (Corporation) time. To those who have looked forward to the costly Utopia of a City park, it may prove, in any shape, disgusting in the extreme; but lawns and fountains, however beautiful, must not stand in the way of hungry millions demanding to be fed. A market-place need not be an unpicturesque object, as our neighbours, the French people, taught us long ago. The meat salesmen will, doubtless, be in favour of warehouses over their market, with a view of keeping down their rents; while the proprietors of property in the neighbourhood, and certain sanitary authorities, will advocate a light, airy structure, well ventilated at top. Whatever it is to be, in the name of the present market maze, let it be erected quickly,

cheaply, and well! Let us feel, when we go to bed, that our dinners are no longer being sent to crowded Newgate Street to take their bitter trial; and that our national cathedral is preserved from dead meat desecration for at least two centuries to come!

GREAT MEETING OF CREDITORS.

If any man be tired of musing upon that numerical abstraction, that perilous jungle for currency doctors, that legacy of Heaven-born ministers and ingenious financiers, the National Debt, and is desirous of changing his painful reflections upon the eight hundred millions of sterling money sunk and gone, for a glance at some of those people to whom this gigantic amount is owing—the national creditors—let him direct his steps towards the Bank of England on any of those great dividend-paying days that come 'round periodically in the heart of the four seasons. Let him enter on that side of the building which is known as the Rotunda (where the interest upon the national debt is paid, when claimed, in four quarterly instalments), and he will find himself in the midst of the crowd of large and small fundholders and annuitants, who have lent the country that money which has been sunk by Britannia in ruling the waves, and who are satisfied with a small and certain return for their capital.

A thorough stranger, looking at some of the national creditors who totter feebly in at the heavy swinging doors, might easily mistake this Rotunda

(and especially the annuity-warrant office) for a building erected over a sacred and miraculous well, at which the sick and weary come to drink, and from which they depart with new life and hope. Amongst the bustling stockbrokers and lawyers, the City merchants and the bankers' clerks, come the lame, the blind, the palsied, the jaundiced, and the paralytic, who are led by relatives or servants up to the appointed corners, and are seated before the appointed books.

One national creditor slinks in, and looks round to see if he is observed, as if his design were rather picking pockets than drawing dividends. Speculative fancy may invest him with any character it thinks proper; but the most probable explanation is, that he is a thrifty father, fearful of being watched by a spendthrift son at the moment when he has drawn his little quarterly income. Perhaps he is a debtor, fearful of being dogged by duns; or a fraudulent bankrupt, who disappeared some years ago with a red wig and the name of Jones, and who comes back to reap the fruits of his concealed property in a gray wig and the name of Jackson. He seems jealous of any one looking over him as he signs the dividend-book, and appears much relieved when he has obtained cash for his warrant, and is ready to leave the building. Perhaps he is some selfish old misanthrope, who has fled from kith and kin; who will die suddenly in some silent lodging before

next quarter-day, without making any sign, and whose name will remain for ever in the records of unclaimed dividends.

Another public creditor is refreshing to look upon, notwithstanding his evident purse-proud vanity. He walks boldly in, accompanied by his son; both being full-blooded, well-fed, well-clothed supporters of their country. The father is glad to show the boy how "warm" he is; and the boy, who has just attained his majority, is gathering the first fruit of a sum which was invested in consols, in his own name, when he was a twelvemonth old, and which has wonderfully increased at compound interest. There is no secrecy here. The father knows what his son has, and what he will yet have, and the son knows exactly what his father has to give him.

Finance makes us acquainted with strange companions. As some part of the interest of the national debt is paid by taking a pinch out of the poor man's teapot, or by lessening the size of his children's sugar-basin, so the national creditor may be an idiot in a bundle of rags, a crossing-sweeper in a good thoroughfare, a successful prize-fighter, or a thrifty cab-driver. One national creditor, standing at the paying-desk with sober steadiness, is a man who has passed much of his life in placing his head where his feet are now placed, and in singing comic songs for the amusement of the public.

He is a well-known clown to a circus. Another national creditor, who seems to be perfectly familiar with the forms of the place, and who even undertakes to direct far more staid and business-looking personages, is neither an eminent stockbroker, a Lombard Street banker, nor a man who has passed his youth in mercantile bowers: he is a favourite low comedian.

Another public creditor appears in the shape of a drover with a goad, who has run in to present his claim during his short visit from Essex. Near him are a lime-coloured labourer from some wharf at Bankside, and a painter, who has left his scaffolding in the neighbourhood during his dinner hour. Next come several widows—some florid, stout, and young: some lean, yellow, and careworn—followed by a gay-looking lady in a showy dress, who may have obtained her share of the national debt in another way. An old man, attired in a stained, rusty, black suit, crawls in, supported by a long staff, like a weary pilgrim who has at last reached the golden Mecca. Those who are drawing money from the accumulation of their hard industry or their patient self-denial, can be distinguished at a glance from those who are receiving the proceeds of unexpected and unearned legacies. The first have a faded, anxious, almost disappointed look; while the second are sprightly, laughing, and observant of their companions.

Towards the hour of noon on the first day of the quarterly payment, the crowd of national creditors becomes more dense, and is mixed up with substantial capitalists in high check neckties, double-breasted waistcoats, curly-rimmed hats, narrow trousers, and round-toed boots. Parties of thin, limp, damp-smelling women, come in with mouldy umbrellas, and long chimney-cowl shaped bonnets made of greasy black silk, or threadbare black velvet—the worn-out fashions of a past generation. Some go about their business in confidential pairs; some, in company with a trusted maid-servant, as fossilized as themselves; some, under the guidance of eager, ancient-looking, girl-children; while some stand alone, in corners, suspicious of help or observation. One national creditor is unwilling, not only that the visitors shall know what amount her country owes her, but also what particular funds she holds as security. She stands carelessly in the centre of the warrant-office, privately scanning the letters and figures nailed all round the walls which direct the applicants at what desk to apply; her long tunnel of a bonnet, while it conceals her face, moves with the guarded action of her head, like the tube of a telescope when the astronomer is searching for a lost planet. Some of these timid female creditors, when their little claim has been satisfied (a thousand pounds in consols produces only seven pounds ten a-quarter), retire to an archway in the

Rotunda, where there are two high-backed leathern chairs, behind the shelter of which, with a needle and thread, they stitch the money into some secret part of their antiquated garments. The two private detective officers on duty generally watch these careful proceedings with amusement and interest, and are looked upon by the old fundholders and annuitants as highly dangerous and suspicious characters.

Some bring their children with them, just as they would take them for a gossip to the chandler's-shop round the corner. The business of receiving dividends is looked upon as a piece of exhilarating dissipation in which it is proper for the whole family to participate. While the lawful female proprietor of stock is engaged with the clerks in the preliminary proceedings, her mother stands by to watch that she is not cheated, her father sits blinking at the counters and the visitors in the recesses of the Rotunda like an hospital patient waiting for his turn, and the children are left to stagger about the warrant-office between the substantial legs of grave capitalists who are the pride and glory of the City. When the pink or buff warrant has been changed for gold or notes, and the whole business admits of no further drawing out, the children are collected by the mother, while the grandmother scolds the blinking grandfather for not taking better care of them, and they are found lying upon their stomachs

looking down a grating; probably under the idea of commanding a view of the gold-cellars.

Another public creditor is a countryman in holiday dress, accompanied by his wife, and who seems not to know exactly what he wants, or where he is to obtain it. He is shy of asking questions, and so is his wife, although she keeps quietly tugging at his arm; for they have heard that London is a sad place, and that every polite and well-dressed man is a sharper. So Agricola and his better-half keep wandering round and round for half an hour, until they can bear the suspense no longer. At last the provincial mind overcomes its doubts, and pours all its troubles, in provincial accents, into the willing ear of one of the Bank porters.

Another public creditor comes gasping in, attended by a tall, stout female companion, with a basket. Baskets, on great dividend days, are almost as fashionable as umbrellas; after these, come capacious reticules; some few of the creditors, or their attendants, carry the street-door key swinging on their fingers. The gasping creditor is small and thin; his legs are wasted, his body is awry, his back is bent forward almost into a hump, his chest is bowed inward, his breath is short, his eyes are staring, his mouth is half open, his fingers are long and bony, and the blue veins on the back of his hands are like cords. His dress is loose and wrinkled, and of a shabby, rusty black. His wife, his nurse,

or his keeper—the stout, florid woman, with the basket—takes him up to the warrant counter, where he is not tall enough or strong enough to reach the book. It is tilted towards him, he leans over with a starting eye, a deep cough, and hard-drawn breath, to scan the proper line, and traces the course with one lean hand, as he signs his name with the other. It is curious to see that a great country, in seeking the sinews of its heroic wars, has not rejected the assistance of even such a feeble mannikin as this.

More withered, twitching women, crawl slowly up to the fountains of gold, until you think that the witches in Macbeth must have been large investers in the funds, and that these, their children, are now drawing the fruits of their provident habits. Mother Shipton is here, or her lineal descendant, as punctually as the day, with Daniel Dancer, the traditional miser, with greasy butchers from Newgate Market; with faithful butlers, who never tampered with their masters' wine; with clean nurses; whose fortune it has been to fall upon the rose-beds of servitude; with young women, who draw their moderate dividends in gold, and look unconsciously amongst the young men, who are doing likewise, for a steady, well-to-do husband to share it. Pickpockets occasionally stray in, done up in what they fondly flatter themselves is the true old stockbroker style, and are surprised to find that their disguise is immediately detected by the officers on duty.

Sometimes these gentry evade the law by securing the victim in marriage whom they intend to rob—for lovely woman is very weak, and some gentlemen are very agreeable.

Another public creditor is borne in like a nodding Guy Fawkes in November, by two companions, on an old, brown, creaking Windsor chair; a mere bundle of dirty rags. She is placed in her chair before the long annuity counter, gazing at the wall with a glassy, meaningless eye, and with her chin sunk down upon the breast of her tattered outer garment. The forms of the office require that she should apply in person, and the two humble friends who take care of her—a man and woman—have brought her up to show her. Her claim is small, and a power of attorney is too costly for her slender resources. A difficulty occurs about signing the book, and the two companions shout loudly in both her ears; but they might as well attempt to awaken the dead. The long old cowl-shaped bonnet does not even move in reply, and the glassy eyes still retain their watery stare of vacancy. A principal clerk is summoned from a private desk to decide in this emergency, and the result is that she is allowed to make the sacred sign which stands for new life in either state of existence. When first she became a creditor of the state, she was young, and, perhaps, sightly, and able to write her name with the best of the small fundholders; but that was

in the good old days, when George the Third was king, and Heaven-born ministers were struggling with the Corsican. Now, her helpless withered arm is lifted up, and clumsily made to form a thick inky cross, with a juicy full-charged quill, as it might have been unresistingly lifted up and made to stab a Rotunda beadle. When her money is, at last, procured, it turns out to be some thirty shillings, which are passed before her listless eyes to give her comfort, and then placed in her pocket under her cold, bloodless, listless touch.

HOUSE-TOP TELEGRAPHS.

About twelve years ago, when the tavern fashion of supplying beer and sandwiches at a fixed price became very general, the proprietor of a small suburban pot-house reduced the system to an absurdity by announcing that he sold a glass of ale and an electric shock for fourpence. That he really traded in this combination of science and drink is more than doubtful, and his chief object must have been to procure an increase of business by an unusual display of shopkeeping wit. Whatever motive he had to stimulate his humour, the fact should certainly be put upon record that he was a man considerably in advance of his age. He was probably not aware that his philosophy in sport would be made a science in earnest in the space of a few years, any more than many other bold humorists who have been amusing on what they knew nothing about. The period has not yet arrived when the readers of Bishop Wilkins's famous discourse upon aërial navigation will be able to fly to the moon, but the hour is almost at hand when the fanciful announcement of the beer-shop keeper will represent an every-day familiar fact. A glass of ale and an electric shock will shortly be sold

for fourpence, and the scientific part of the bargain will be something more useful than a mere fillip to the human nerves. It will be an electric shock that sends a message across the house-tops through the web of wires to any one of a hundred and twenty district telegraph stations, that are to be scattered amongst the shopkeepers all over the town.*

The industrious spiders have long since formed themselves into a commercial company, called the London District Telegraph Company (limited), and they have silently, but effectively, spun their trading web. One hundred and sixty miles of wire are now fixed along parapets, through trees, over garrets, round chimney-pots, and across roads on the southern side of the river, and the other one hundred and twenty required miles will soon be fixed in the same manner on the northern side. The difficulty decreases as the work goes on, and the sturdiest Englishman is ready to give up the roof of his castle in the interests of science and the public good, when he finds that many hundreds of his neighbours have already led the way.

The out-door mechanical exigencies of this London district telegraph require at least six house-top resting-places in the space of a mile. To get these places at the nominal rental of a shilling a-year (with three months' notice for removal) has been the object of the company, professedly that a low

* October, 1859.

tariff of charges may be based upon a moderate outlay of capital on the permanent way. The peculiarity of the company's operations, in appealing rather to the public sentiment of the middle and lower classes than to their sense of business or desire for gain, has prolonged its out-door negotiations, though not to any great extent. The trial may have been severe, but the British householder, with a few exceptions, has nobly stood the test. He has shown that, if properly applied to and properly treated, he may belong to a nation of shopkeepers, and yet be something more than a mere mercenary citizen.

The first time the proposition to electrify all London was brought before the British householder, it was calculated to inspire considerable alarm. The telegraph, as at present existing, is not a popular institution. Its charges are high; its working is secret and bewildering to the average mind. Its case, as displayed at the railway stations, may look like a mixture of the beer-machine and the eight-day clock; but the curious hieroglyphics and restless arrows on its dial surface are like the differential calculus framed in a gooseberry tart. The unknown may masquerade in the dress of the known; but the railway porter will still shake his head.

When the sole depositary of the telegraphic secret has gone to dinner, the whole electric system of that particular railway station must stand abso-

lutely still. A certain amount of familiarity will breed contempt; an equal amount of unfamiliarity will breed awe and dread. The British householder has never seen a voltaic battery kill a cow, but he has heard that it is quite capable of such a feat. The telegraph is worked, in most cases, by a powerful voltaic battery, and, therefore, the British householder, having a general dread of lightning, logically keeps clear of all such machines.

The British householder (number one) took time to consider. The pole that the company wished to raise upon his roof might not be ornamental; might not suit the taste of his wife, who, at that moment, was unwell; might not meet with the approbation of his landlord, who was very fastidious, and very old. If the company would like to communicate with his landlord, that gentleman was to be found in Berkshire, if he had not gone to Switzerland, if he was not up the Rhine. The British householder (number sixty) was only one of a firm, and he could give no definite answer without his partners' consent. The British householder (number sixty-eight) was of a vacillating disposition, and after he had said yes, he took the trouble to run up the street, because he had suddenly decided to say no. The British householder (number seventy) was the second mate of a trading vessel, at that time supposed to be running along the South American coast. His wife was not prepared to say whether he had any objec-

tion to a flag-staff (although she thought he had not); and she could give no permission to the company until his return. The British householder (number seventy-four) very politely allowed a survey of his roof; and when the most eligible point was fixed upon, he had legal doubts whether he had any power over it, as it was on a party wall. His next-door neighbour, when applied to, was equally scrupulous, and without counsel's opinion it was impossible to get any further. The British householder (number ninety) was in a mist with regard to the whole scheme. He associated telegraphs of all kinds with large railway stations; and large railway stations with red and white signal lights. He would sacrifice a good deal for science and the public interest, but to have his parapet glaring all night like a doctor's doorway, was more than he could bear to think of. An explanation, accompanied by a display of small pocket-models (one of a standard, as large as a pencil-case; the other of a bracket, the size of a watch), was necessary to pacify him, and when he found that no lamp was required, he gave his conditional consent. The British householder (number ninety-two) was inclined to be facetious, and he hoped that the company would not do anything to blow him up. The British householder (number ninety-eight) was only too glad to be of service, but unfortunately his house was so old and so crumbling, that not another nail could be driven

into it with safety. The British householder (number five hundred and four) was an old lady subject to fits, and she only wondered what next would be proposed to her to hurry her into the grave. The British householder (number six hundred and ten) was another old lady, who worshipped a clean passage; and she merely consented upon condition that the workpeople only passed through her house once, to get at the roof, carefully wiping their shoes on the mat in the passage, and once again, to leave the premises, on coming down, carefully wiping their shoes on the mat in the attic. An agreement was made upon this peculiar basis, and the carpenters were kept sixteen hours amongst the chimney-pots, their food being drawn up by a rope from the street. The British householder (number seven hundred and six) was almost rash in his obliging disposition, and he gave the company full permission to take his roof off if they found it in the way. The British householder (number seven hundred and four) might have been induced to give his assistance, had not his wife loudly warned him, from the depths of the shop parlour, to beware. The consent of British householder (number eight hundred and ten) was secured by a display of the pocket-models; but, when the workmen arrived with a pole as long as a clothes-prop, he stopped them, on the ground that they were attempting an imposition. He had not allowed for the portable character of the

models, and the pole he expected to see fixed on the house-top, was about the size of a tooth-pick.

Nearly four thousand calls were made upon this errand, to get the consent of some nineteen hundred people; and this only for the hundred and sixty miles of metropolitan wire already raised. The hundred and twenty miles remaining to be surveyed* will involve, perhaps, nearly three thousand more visits before the requisite fourteen hundred consents are obtained. The landlords of all house property must be consulted as well as the tenants, which doubles the labour of the company's agents. When the wire is finally fixed over the two hundred and eighty miles, there will have been about seven thousand interviews and negotiations, and nearly three thousand five hundred contracts.

Such is the labour required to spin the thin web that is now shooting across crowded thoroughfares, or creeping under the heavy paving-stones, and joining the hands of chapels, taverns, palaces, police-stations, warehouses, hovels, and shops. Other labour will be required to bring down the mysterious strings, so that every one may be able to move the living puppets, from station to station, from Highgate to Peckham, from Hammersmith to Bow.

Some of these strings (perhaps to the number of ten) will drop into district stations—offices that will act as centres of particular divisions; others (per-

* October, 1859.

haps to the number of a hundred) will drop into familiar shops, and trading-places: amongst the pickle-jars of the oilman, the tarts of the pastry-cook, the sugar-casks of the grocer, the beer-barrels of the publican, the physic-bottles of the dispensing chemist. The Post-office, industrious and effective as it is, will find an active rival standing by its side —bidding against it for popularity, coming in to share its message-carrying trade. The elements of nature will be harnessed for hack-work; and four pennyworth of lightning will be as common as a box of pills. The old cab-horse will wonder why he is resting so long on his stony stand; and the two millions and more of busy metropolitan inhabitants may welcome another means of easing their crowded streets. Everybody will find a way of talking over everybody else's head, or under everybody else's feet, or behind everybody else's back. "No door-mat to-night" will be whispered from Brompton to Hampstead, and no one will be aware of the fact but the two communicants. The Elephant and Castle will despatch the tenderest messages to the Angel at Islington; and as soon as the back of young Emma's mamma is turned at Camberwell, young Edwin will be fully informed at Chelsea. St. John's Wood will suddenly be invited to a roughly got up, but pleasant party at Holloway; and Kensington will be told that a private box for the Opera is waiting for it at Bow Street. The doctor at Fins-

bury will be requested to step up, at once, to Park Lane; and Bayswater will stop the toilet of Clapham by announcing a sudden postponement of a dinner party. Greenwich will be told by Kensington to prepare a whitebait banquet in three hours; and Rotherhithe will be informed by Camden Town that the child is a boy, and that the mother is doing extraordinarily well. The firemen of Cannon Street will be called to a red-hot task at Blackheath; and when a policeman is missing—as usual—from his beat, a "reserve" can be summoned from the station. The saddest of all messages will also fly across the tidings of hope; for death will sometimes present himself at the shop-counter to whisper his ghostly dispensations along the wires.

The great centre of all this system is in Threadneedle Street, London, where a graceful school of about sixty young ladies are even now learning the mysteries of the old railway telegraph signals. Whether they are training their minds and hands in an art that will be wholly set aside yet remains to be seen; but whatever machines may be used at the central and district stations, it is certain that the sub-district, or shop-stations, will require something exceedingly simple and convenient.

The telegraphs most generally in use, both in this country and on the Continent, require great skill and practice to work; and, in translating their arbitrary signs into ordinary language, it becomes

necessary to have specially educated persons to work them. This necessity was, for the first time, obviated by the system of telegraphs invented by Professor Wheatstone in 1840, in which either the letters of the alphabet on a fixed dial were pointed to by a moving hand, or a moving dial presenting the letters successively behind a fixed aperture. In these, the transmission of the message consisted simply in bringing in succession the letters composing it opposite a fixed mark, by means of an apparatus called a transmitter. These instruments were constructed to work, either by the currents generated by induction from a permanent magnet, or by the aid of a voltaic battery; in the former case the instruments required no preparation to put them, or attention to keep them, in action. Since then, Professor Wheatstone has devoted much time to the improvement of this class of telegraphs; the principal object of which has been to effect their movements with greater steadiness, certainty, and rapidity than hitherto, and by means of magnets of small dimensions. As the instruments are at present constructed, a lady or a child may, after a few minutes' instruction, send or receive a message by them; and, with practice, as many signals may be conveyed per minute as by any telegraphs in present use. Especially applicable to house-top telegraphs, they are more efficient than any others for interchanging messages on railways, in public

offices, manufactories, private mansions, docks, mines, etc. Being very portable, and requiring no preparation, they are the best telegraphs for military purposes; and being constructed so as not to be affected by any extraneous movement, they can be used with perfect safety in ships, even on a rough sea, or on railway trains in motion. Professor Wheatstone's new telegraphs have been some time in daily use at the London Docks, and between the Houses of Parliament and the Queen's Printing-office, two miles distant. In form these telegraphs are as portable and familiar as a quart pot or a loaf of bread. A circular box, the shape and size of a small ship's compass, is placed over the battery of magnets that would go in an ordinary hat-case. The surface of the box presents a dial face, like a clock, round which are arranged the letters of the alphabet, a sign or two, and the ten numerals. Opposite each of the letters—spreading out from the side of the box, like an ornamental fringe round a dial-plate—is a single tongue of brass, resembling a large key of a German flute. By pressing down one of these tongues with your finger (opposite the letter A for example) you cause a needle, like the long hand of a watch, to point at the same letter on another dial exactly similar in form, but smaller in size, placed under the eye of your correspondent at the other end of the wire, if need be, miles off. The distance of your needle-dial from your battery may be thirty

miles, or further, according to the power of your magnets; but the action of the letter-key upon the letter-needle is instantaneous and infallible. The same operation, accompanied by the same result, will indicate numerals, according to a preconcerted sign, as the figures are placed round the two dials, as far as they will go, in a circle outside the letters. If the battery is portable, the corresponding machinery is much more so, being even smaller than many an ordinary French mantel-shelf clock. The needle-dial is fixed in a small barrel, and fitted up so as to revolve like a microscope, and suit the height of the person observing it. A voltaic battery would be less costly than magnets, but more liable to get out of order in shop-stations. The whole apparatus, as it stands, would not take up half the space required by a post-office desk, or require any more intellect to work it than is required to write or read a letter. An average housemaid could receive and despatch a message, if the shopman had just stepped round the corner, providing she could spell a few words of two, or three syllables.

Upon the adoption of some such apparatus as this—most probably upon this particular machine—will depend the success of the London District Telegraph Company. The whole scheme of popular telegraphs runs in a circle. Without simplicity and clearness of machinery there can be no extensive formation of cheap stations; without a number

of cheap stations there can be no moderate tariff of charges; without this moderate tariff there can be no general patronage of telegraphs by the great body of the public. Without general patronage, again, there can be no moderate tariff.

Starting, as the company does, in some degree upon a sentiment, by soliciting the unpaid co-operation of numerous householders and landlords, it will be morally bound to place itself in that position in which it can effect the greatest amount of public good at the lowest possible tariff of charges. The trading instincts of its board of directors will compel them to do this, if they are not kept in the right path by any higher feeling. It will be fortunate, therefore, for the metropolitan public that, though the electric shock may not always be required with the glass of ale, both may be included in the fourpence, when absolutely necessary.

RIGHT THROUGH THE POST.

SOME time in the would-be merry month of May of this present year (1859), I was transformed into a letter—a highly-privileged letter—thanks to my friend, Mr. Page, the Inspector-General of Mails.

I was sent to the post in the hands of a boy—a boy who had often posted my letters, and who now posted me. In the regular course of things I should have gone to the nearest office—a grocer's shop—where I should have reposed, for a time, within hearing of the grinding of a steam coffee-mill, the bumping of sugar-packets upon the counter, and within the fragrant influence of the pounded mocha. This was, however, prevented by another boy, who met my carrier just as he was dallying with his charge, having twice put me into the hole devoted to the inland and colonial mails without relinquishing his hold, and having twice withdrawn me in playful hesitation.

"Don't go a-chuckin' the letter in there," said the other boy.

"Why not?" asked my boy.

"Put 'em in a lamp-post broke short off," replied the other boy.

The two set off "up the road" for one of the pillar letter-boxes. Here much climbing, peering, and rough inspection of the novel office took place, and it was full ten minutes before I was dropped in. I felt as if I was sinking into the bowels of the earth, and I was much relieved when I found I had reached the bottom.

My companions were pretty numerous, but they were nearly all business letters. True, my pillar-box was in a business neighbourhood, not far from the chief office; but that was not alone sufficient to account for this fact. Although there are nearly twelve hundred of these useful traps set in different parts of the metropolis, to catch as many as possible of the five hundred and twenty-three millions of letters that flew last year, as thick as locusts, all over the land, there is a certain class of letters that never go into anything but a "regular" post-office, and probably never will. Any lady who could post a love-letter in one of the pillar-boxes must be an extremely unconventional, bold, and decided person, rather difficult to deal with harmoniously in the married state.

For this and other reasons my companions were full-sized, blue-wove, well-directed commercial letters, most of them announcing the approaching appearance of "our Mr. Binks," with well-assorted samples, in some expectant country town, and some of them conveying to some unsuspecting manu-

facturer the earliest intelligence of a heavy bad debt.

After we had rested together very peaceably for about an hour, the door of our temporary prison-house was opened by a scarlet postman. He looked in as a boy looks into a bird-trap which he has set in a field, or as a climbing urchin looks into a nest half full of eggs in the hollow of a tree. We were taken out without much ceremony or delay, and thrust into a bag, and in about ten minutes' time we found ourselves within the great inland sorting-office of the General Post-office.

The Post-office presents almost the only example of a Government trading establishment, conducted, perhaps, better than it could be conducted under any possible combination of private enterprise, and producing a large yearly profit that exhibits a steady increase. The profit, after paying expenses, amounted in 1858 to more than a million and a quarter sterling, which was paid, as usual, into the Exchequer. This money being a tax upon letter-writers and letter-receivers for the benefit of those who neither write nor receive letters, and a tax which presses most heavily, no doubt, on trade, it is a question whether it might not be judiciously expended in improving the postal system, or in reducing the postal rates. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, however, is not willing to give up such a large portion of the annual public income, and the Post-master-

General is therefore encouraged to make the balance as large as he possibly can. The above profit was derived from receiving and delivering 523 millions of letters, in the proportion of 428 millions to England, 44 millions to Ireland, and 51 millions to Scotland; from the foreign and colonial letters (an unimportant item); and from the commission on issuing nearly twelve and three-quarters of millions sterling in money orders for the United Kingdom. This latter department, which, in its operations, much resembles banking, is not a portion of the postal system, properly so called, and is conducted in a distinct building in St. Martin's-le-Grand.

Nearly one-fourth of the whole 523 millions of letters in 1858 were delivered in London and the suburban districts; and, counting those also which were despatched, nearly one half passed through the London chief office. The number of newspapers delivered in the United Kingdom during the same year, was seventy-one millions, and the number of book packets seven millions and a-quarter. One letter in every three hundred was returned to the writers, owing to the failure in the attempts to deliver them; and one newspaper in every hundred and twenty-four newspapers, for the same reason; making, in the first case, nearly one million and three-quarters of letters during the year, and in the second case, nearly six hundred thousand newspapers.

The receiving-houses and post-offices provided for this enormous circulation, now number eleven thousand and a-quarter throughout the United Kingdom, and the pillar letter-boxes, which are gradually advancing in use and popularity, and are at present confined to the metropolis, have now reached one thousand one hundred and sixty-eight.

From the moment that a letter leaves the hand of the sender, and falls into the box, it becomes the property of the Post-office, for purposes of delivery, and cannot be withdrawn. If it contains any hasty phrase, and any bitterness of tone that the writer regrets; if its weight is considered greater than the head or heads upon its surface will carry; or if any important particular is thought to be omitted in its address, it must, nevertheless go unaltered through all the allotted stages of its course.

The Great Inland Sorting-office, in which I found myself, in my character of a letter, is not unlike Exeter Hall, furnished with long rows of tables, desks, and shelves, at which are seated a number of active, earnest-looking, time-begrudging beings, every one engaged as if legerdemain had been his sole occupation from the cradle, and as if he had a certain task to perform, with only another hour to live. Taskmasters are passing to and fro, directing and inspecting the work, but the chief taskmaster of all is a large clear-faced clock, which watches the hurrying crowd

with the calm steady look of a sphinx, and which is glanced at in its turn by some of the labourers, as the conductor of an orchestra is glanced at by timid performers.

I was at once turned out of the bag, along with my companions, on to the top of a large table amongst a heap of other letters—a fortuitous concourse of atoms,—mixed and entangled as only a mound of letters can be entangled and mixed. Some fifty men immediately attacked this mound, like eager bone-pickers at a virgin dust-heap, or rather, considering its playing-card shape and appearance, like maniac gamblers at a scramble when the police are knocking at the outer gate.

All this activity has no other object than to "face" the heap, to put those troublesome letters on their backs, which are obstinately lying on their faces, and to turn those other letters round upon their legs which are at that moment standing on their heads. As fast as a pack which makes a full handful is scratched into order, it is transferred to another table, where the letters undergo another process of stamping.

This process has to obliterate the postage heads, so that they can never be taken off and used again, and also to stamp the letter with a circular impression, containing the date, and the name of London—the town from which the letter is about to be despatched. This task is confided to a nimble-fingered

gentleman, who seems inclined to back himself against any steam-engine under the roof, past, present, or to come. Placing a number of letters before him in an upright position, with the postage-head in the upper right corner, he strokes them down gently but rapidly, one by one, under his right hand, which holds the stamping die, and comes down with unerring precision and bewildering rapidity full upon the label. A hundred heads are damaged in a minute by this skilful operator, who requires a new die every evening; and the only partial break that occurs in his labour is when a letter either wants a head, or contains it in the lower left hand, instead of the upper right-hand corner. Dipping the die on to the ink-brush, or stamping a paper at intervals, that stands at his side, to keep a rough record in twenties or fifties of the letters passing through the office for that night's mail, are eccentric diversions of the head-blotting duty, performed almost too quickly to strike the eye.

After I and my companions had suffered this ring-worm disfigurement, and also the similar disfigurement of the dating stamp, we were parcelled out to be sorted into the bags for the different leading towns, or into divisions for the resorting on the different lines of railway.

Those letters that are perfect in full payment and clear handwriting are sent to their final bag,

or their temporary division, without further questioning or examination; but those corpulent documents, whose bodies have grown too big for their heads, or in whose cases two heads are officially considered to be better than one, are transferred to the weighing clerk; while those letters whose addresses are faintly conveyed in the yellowest of ink, the most cramped of cramped writings, of the most unknown of unknown tongues, are transferred to a table of officers, skilful in solving these passing dark problems, and known throughout the department as the "blind men" of the Post-office.

The weighing clerk is an officer cultivated in sight and touch, whose eye can detect in an instant the letter that is attempting to pass on its journey at half-price, and whose finger, by merely gliding over the surface of the doubtful letters in the process of counting them, can at once assist and confirm the judgment of the sharp and experienced eye. Not one letter in a dozen, perhaps, that is overweight, requires weighing, and not one half of the suspected impostors are convicted and marked with the postal double payment fine.

The table of the "blind men" is the calmest spot in the building. Theirs is no work of mere mechanical dexterity, that can be brought by constant practice to a dazzling rapidity of execution. It requires much searching in directories, much guessing, much mental effort, to solve most of the

riddles in writing and spelling that come upon this table The irregular combinations of the alphabet alone present a boundless field of variety to the ignorant and the persevering; and when the combination of Christian names and surnames, names of towns, and names of counties, as well as the forms of letters, and the parts of a letter's proper superscription, come to be added, arithmetic can hardly convey the result. It is to this table that all those riddle-letters find their way, upon whose surface Islington is spelt and written "East Linton;" and the late Iron Duke is addressed, long after his death, as the "Duk .hor wellerton, Ip ark corner, London, englent, or.hulswear." The blind men are often called upon to decipher such directions as the following, conveyed in the most undecided of hand-writings:—

"To Mrs. Slater to the Prince of wales in fits Roy place Kinteston London paid." The blind men decide that this means the "Prince of Wales" public-house, Fitzroy Place, Kentish Town; and their verdict is final.

Sometimes comic boys address their relatives in London in the rudest pictorial form, giving a good deal of trouble to the blind men. A picture of a garden and a street, with a fancy portrait of the person for whom the letter is intended, drawn outside the note by a not very artistic youth of seven years of age, is not calculated to ease the sorting

labour of the General Post-office. Letters addressed to "Mary Ann Street, Red Rive lane, Luke St, next door to the ocean;" "To No. 3 Cros bsbry Row For The Female whith the Infant up Bromley Stairs;" "Ann Poror at Mrs. Winhursts No. 24 Next door to two to one;" "Mikell Goodliff at St. Nouts Printis to a Shoo Maker Mis his name not known Mrs. Cooper is grandmother to the Lad;" "elixa clarck' saxton hotel saintluord hon se;" and "This fanke Taghe Warkitt ill Wise Comse Wile of Wifhe," with many more like them have come, and are constantly coming under the notice of this branch of the sorting department.

The blind men feel an artistic pride in mastering every difficulty, although the difficulty is to be taken to the land's end for the small charge of a penny. Failing all attempts to make clear that which is never to be read in this world, the interior (after the proper forms have been observed) is, at last, looked into, only to present a larger and more enigmatical surface still. The only colourable explanation that can be given of the mystery, based upon the annual average of riddles which come before the blind men, is, that some Irish hop-picker, passing through London on his road to Kent, is anxious to communicate with a relative in some part of his native country.

The Sorting Office for newspapers and packets is upon an upper floor, and is reached by an endless

staircase, worked by machinery, which revolves and ascends, like the spokes of the treading-mill. The business in this department is very similar to that below, except that the sorting proceeds more slowly, and the packets, while fewer, are much larger. The "blind man" here is chiefly engaged with the newspapers, whose moist addresses have either come off, or been partially torn; and his work, like that of the department, is the heaviest on Friday night, the great newspaper despatch night of the week. He employs himself a good deal in guessing the kind of newspaper which would probably go to certain individuals, when he finds himself with a number of addresses without papers, and a number of papers without addresses. No disappointment is so bitter to the country resident as to miss his weekly budget of news and reading, when he comes down to breakfast on a Saturday morning, or to tear open the cover, and find a Tory organ, which he hates, in place of the Whig organ, which he loves. The newspaper blind man performs his work as carefully as he can; and if he does make an occasional mistake in sending the wrong paper to the wrong man, his countrymen must forgive him when they know the difficulties with which he has to contend.

By a quarter past seven I have been duly sorted, and I am hurried, along with a crowd of letter companions, into a large box, which is then sealed with

strong sealing-wax, and sent sliding down a smooth, shining, steep, inclined plane into the day-light, and on to the platform of the Post-office northern court-yard. Here we find a number of guards and porters ready to receive us, in company with many other bags, and many really dismal, but rather would-be gay-looking, vehicles, drawn up to convey us to our different railway stations. These are the Post-office vans, furnished and horsed by contract to the department for a payment of ten thousand pounds per annum, and forming the only existing link that binds the railway-governed Post-office of to-day to the mail-coach-governed Post-office of the past.

In shape, the Post-office van is like a prison van, in colour it is a mixture of dingy black and red, and in condition it is dreadfully shattered and work-worn. Something of the hearse also mingles in its composition, and something of the omnibus. Its stand, when off duty, is at the end of Bedford Row, Holborn, where it basks in the sun, within a maze of posts, against the dead wall, looking with its companions like a crooked line of Chelsea pensioners waiting for the doctor. They are occasionally used as night-houses of refuge by the Arabs of St. Giles's, who have been known to ride in them asleep to meet the morning mails at one of the railway stations.

In one of these vehicles I was stuffed with my

companions, feeling very much (as the man must have felt who was placed in charge of us) as if I had been convicted of felony at the Old Bailey, and was going to a penal servitude of four years. Our destination was, however, Euston Square, and we were the first of some seventeen similar despatches, in some seventeen similar vans, that form an unbroken stream between St. Martin's-le-Grand and the London and North-Western Railway terminus, every night from 7 P.M. to 8.30 P.M.

When we arrived, we were received by responsible Post-office clerks, passed through a special entrance made for us by the railway company in the side wall of the station, to save a few minutes of our valuable time, and deposited full in the front of our special train.

Our train was nearly all Post-office, and very little public. Those passengers who went by it had to pay a high tariff, and book their places some few days in advance. The train consisted of seven postal carriages and three passenger carriages (according to contract), all made up ready to start from 7 to 8.35 P.M. The passenger carriages were in front, the mail carriages behind, and the latter consisted of a sorting carriage and mail-bag van, or tender, for the Midland and East-Coast Mail; two sorting-offices and one tender for the North Mail (of which I was a part); and two other tenders employed for the intermediate mails. In two of

the three sorting-offices in the train, the letters posted in London, or passing through London for the smaller towns on the line, and which have already undergone one divisional sortation at the Chief Office, are received, and again sorted for their final destination. In the third of the three sorting-offices in the train, the bags of cross-post letters from the towns arrived at on the road are received, sorted, and, in some cases, made up and redespatched, without the train having had to submit to a moment's delay, or to slacken its even pace of five and forty miles an hour. This is the Railway Post-office—properly so called—and into this department of the train—being a privileged letter—I was freely permitted to go.

The Railway Post-office was an exceedingly comfortable, well-furnished business carriage, broad as the gauge of the railway would allow, and as long as an ordinary room. The door was in the centre, having on its right a large window hole, shut up with a wooden shutter, and extending across nearly one-half of the carriage. Sometimes the interior reminded me of a bagatelle-table, when I looked at the green cloth counters running along both ends, and nearly along the whole length of the back; sometimes it reminded me of a large laundry, when I looked at the full bags lying unopened upon the floor, and the many empty bags (marked with the names of towns) hanging on pegs

from the half wall on the left of the entrance-door. Sometimes the hundred pigeon-holes and shelves which covered the three sides of the carriage immediately over the three counters, suggested an elaborate mahogany kitchen-dresser, the spaces in which were being continually filled by maniac card-players, silently dealing out eternal, never-ending, ever-renewing packs of cards in a phantom game of whist.

As soon as the average speed of the train was attained, the bags on the floor were opened by the guard. Packets of letters, tied up with a string, were thrown upon the back counter, to be divided amongst the three sorting clerks (the whole postal part of the train employs fourteen clerks and six guards), dozens of newspapers, parcels, pill-boxes, sample-packets, thin cases of artificial flowers, rolls of music, and photographs done up in envelopes as large as tea-trays, were thrown upon the end counter at the head of the carriage; and the work began. Each man stood under a shaded globular lamp, shaking very much throughout his frame, and swaying to and fro like a circus-rider on his horse. The carriage is bright and glowing, and its speed is something between forty and fifty miles an hour. Letters are rapidly conveyed to the different pigeon-holes, sometimes high, sometimes low, sometimes on one side, and then on the other; sometimes with a little hesitation when the writing which tells the

post-town is not very clear (the name of the county being placed on the letter is rather an hindrance to the sorters than otherwise); sometimes, with a circular wave of the hand, when the mind is in doubt, for a moment, where to deposit the letter; nearly always, more with regard to a sorting system peculiar to the sorter, than the names of the different towns which appear over the pigeon-holes. One clerk devotes himself to the registered letters, which have to be entered on a printed list; and he stands in a half-stooping posture, at a little distance from the counter, with a quill pen in one hand, and a small square board, on which is stretched the paper, clasped firmly in the other; jotting down the names and addresses in a touch-and-go style, which long practice has adapted to the motion of a flying, wabbling platform, that passes over a mile in a minute. The third clerk, preferring to be seated at his work, pulls out a swivel seat from under the counter that looks very much like a dark Westphalia ham.

After the guard has been busy, for a short time, at the head end of the carriage, seemingly in tossing the newspapers and packets about, like a potato-washer over a tub of potatoes, he takes another turn at the bags, and makes up the sealed mail for the first post-station. When he has tied and sealed the dirty white skin bag, which contains the allowance of letters for one small town, and a score of smaller villages, he straps it up in a dark brown leather

covering until it looks like a pedlar's pack, and then he proceeds to attach it to the external machinery of the carriage. He is an experienced guard, familiar with every river, bridge, and point, who knows, by the sound of the roaring and clattering train, at what moment to "let down the net, and put out for delivery," as the printed instructions phrase it. The shutter of the large single window-hole is pushed down in its grove, and a gust of cold night air, laden with the scent of earth, and grass, and trees, comes freshly into the hot and busy carriage. The guard looks out along the dark line of rising and falling hedges, and through the trees at the low horizon, for some expected signal light, and then proceeds to the door, which he pushes back in its side groove. Reaching out his arm round the window side of the carriage, he drags in an iron bar, that swings by several hinges, at the extremity of which he fastens the packed mail, now lying on the floor, by means of a spring, and casts it away from the carriage over the rails, where it drops and hangs suspended at right angles, like a heavy bait put out to catch fish. This operation completed, he returns to the open window, where he pushes down a mechanical arrangement, which forms a projecting receiving net, and which sounds, in its descent, as if the whole carriage were falling to pieces. After a few seconds' suspense, the bait appears to have taken; the carriage passes under several bags of letters, which are

suspended from the postal station, and over a similar net, projecting from the station also; the machinery of the railway acts upon the machinery of the carriage; the one bag drops into the roadside net—or into a roadside ditch, as any one would suppose who merely observed the operation from the carriage; at the same instant, several bags come tumbling into the carriage net, as if from the moon. Before the guard has hauled them all in, dragged up the net, and shut out the fresh night air once more, the whole train has shot half a mile beyond the place where the Railway Post-office has effected this advantageous exchange.

The guard instantly plunges head first amongst his new treasures, which he opens, and presents to the sorting clerks. Letters that have been brought by hand and cart from some quiet village in the heart of Hertfordshire, and whose destination is some quiet village in the heart of Kent, are now careering towards the north with the speed of the wind, to be sorted, made up, and sent back, along their proper arteries, at the next postal station. Local papers going to London to set an example to the metropolitan press; London papers sucked dry by provincial politicians, and sent across the country to some fourth or fifth day's reader; letters from country grocers to their London merchants, which smell of tobacco, cheese, and tea; dead letters from the country post town, done up in a funeral black

bag, and money-order communications encased in large coarse envelopes, the colour of golden orange; neat little pink notes from Lady Fusbos in the country to the Hon. Miss Busfos in town, one posted close upon the other, and the latter rendering the former null and void; letters from country lawyers about rents and land, addressed in that unmistakable clear hand which is recognized as the law clerk's with half a glance; letters from country drapers to that firm not far from Watling Street, stating that it will be utterly impossible to meet that bill which will fall due on the fourth of that month; letters from the indefatigable Mr. Binks, the commercial traveller, enclosed in printed envelopes, addressed to "the firm," and containing long sheets of orders to a highly satisfactory amount; letters with narrow black borders, that show how death has distantly appeared to some household, and letters with broad black borders, that show how his dark shadow has fallen very near; letters with the whitest of envelopes, and the firmest of contents, which tell of something more cheerful than the grave; letters in brown and yellow envelopes, with equally solid contents, which convey some country auctioneer's card to view a property that is advertised for sale; letters that are warm and affectionate, free and easy, cold and dignified; letters where compliments are presented, where Sir gradually thaws into Dear sir, Dear sir into My dear

sir, and so on through Tomkins, Henry, Harry, Hal, Old fellow, and Everlasting brick; letters that are registered in heaven, letters that registered on earth, and letters that are registered in the other extreme—these, and many more whose contents could not be guessed by their exteriors, are amongst the treasures which our guard has hauled in by the way.

Other baits were hung out at different points of our journey, always with the same successful result; and after we got to Rugby the work became doubly heavy as far as Preston, and our three clerks were increased to six. Heavy bags, it is true, were taken out at places where we stopped, but bags that were equally heavy were generally taken in, and the labour was always being renewed from the point where it seemed to leave off. The sorting from Rugby became more fast and furious; the ventilation of the carriage became more doubtful, and the scent of the sealing-wax more strong; the dust increased in a very perceptible degree; the sorters became more fishy-eyed and worn out, especially as they approached Preston—the town where they were to be relieved. The five thousand letters which each officer is bound to sort during one journey, whether it be long or short, were just finished by each individual as the signal whistle announced the entry into the not very sightly station of the old Lancashire town. I leaped off

the end counter, where I had long been sorted, out of the way, in my character as a letter, and at once reassumed my character of a bed-seeking, coffee-drinking man. The idle apprentices who had been tossing restlessly upon their costly, luxurious, first-class couches throughout the night, might have looked with envy upon the group of industrious apprentices who had never found a moment of time from London to Preston that hung, in the slightest degree, heavily upon their hands. Another batch of industrious apprentices were waiting to fill the vacant places, and before the inexperienced traveller had ascertained where he was, the Railway Post-office and its adjuncts were again upon their way. Dozens of such offices were at the same moment flying all over the country—flying, as they began to fly some twenty years ago—as they have, one or other, never ceased to fly from that hour to this. They will never cease to fly to the end of time.

MUSICAL PRIZE FIGHT.

FEW London frequenters of spas and watering-places know the sandy town of Redcar, on the north coast of Yorkshire. It is one of those remote refuges which Nature has provided for bathers who are tired of even the moderate gaiety of Worthing; for north-country millowners who wish to wash away the smoke of Barnsley, or the soot of Sheffield; for invalids who are advised to fly from the noise of society into the noise of the elements, and for yachting barristers on the Northern Circuit, who have more taste for catching cod-fish a score of miles out in the German Ocean, than for dangling after broad-hatted beauties at Harrogate or Scarborough. These are the high and important objects for which Redcar has risen from an old and obscure collection of fishing-huts on a line of sand-hills, into a broad, calm street of red-bricked lodging-houses. There is no more human tumult, there are no more signs of life, there is much less of dissipation, in the Redcar High Street on a September evening, than in any well-conducted metropolitan cemetery. The place may be likened to a long cell, into which it is good for worldlings to retire for a while and reflect

on the tenor of their past life, with a view of improving the future. The few silent shops seem sacred to the memory of the names over their doorways; and, although the draper's sends forth a perfume of merinos, silks, and fustian, and the grocer's a scent of coffee, tea, and pepper, both shops may, with very little imagination, be taken for family sepulchres. A shaky cart may jolt by with a load of glistening sea-weed for manuring land, but the horse looks drowsy and contented, as his hissing cargo drops in long brown flakes on the sandy road, and the driver moves as if he had his whole lifetime in which to perform his task. So close as Redcar is to the jar and din of the Middlesboro' iron-works, it neither hears them, nor cares for them one jot. It wants to be left alone. It has been a fishing-town beyond the memory of the oldest man, and a fishing-town you will be pleased to let it remain. It has gone so far for half a century as to net lodgers as well as fish; but the lodgers were none of its seeking. As they think proper to come, they must be respectably provided for; but with no idea of extortion, or of making the most by them. Its principal hotels, while they furnish every comfort, have not yet got beyond the simplicity and moderation of commercial travellers' prices.

The iron road is too near not to tantalize the inhabitants with the prospect of cheap and rapid

travelling—too distant to be readily available; the stage coach is unknown, the omnibus has faded away, and the heavy rumbling carrier's cart, with its three coarse horses harnessed head and tail, remains the undisputed master of the position.

The inhabitants of this hill district are clannish and self-reliant. They live and marry amongst themselves, and present the high cheek-bones and hard features which generally mark the Yorkshire race. A few wild offshoots are occasionally sent out as scouts, in the shape of wandering boys who see the misty sea between the hills, and go down to its tempting fishing-boats, and away in its gliding ships; but they return as "master mariners" to be buried in their native moorland churchyard, and to add their testimony to those who have been round the world, and pronounce that there is nothing in it worth mentioning.

A favourable specimen of a moorland village in the hills, is Lofthouse, in Cleveland, about half way between Redcar and Whitby. Attracted by a handbill advertisement of a "Grand Village Band Contest" at this place, on Friday, September 30, 1859, I procured a dog-cart at Redcar, and was driven over the greatest part of the way, like the hero of Lammermoor, along the sands, but with not quite such a melancholy result. Winding slowly down a hill which we had reached, into a valley; past a waggon heavily laden with provisions, which

was toiling over to the village festival, while the group of shouting schoolboys who were interested in its contents, were making short cuts to Lofthouse, by scampering over the stubbly fields; past the village clergyman and his favourite monitor, driving over on the same cheerful errand in a substantial four-wheeled chaise; past another waggon, loaded with gravel-coloured peasants mixed with women, boys, and girls, on shafts, back, front, and sides, and almost on the wheels; past a solitary omnibus from Guisboro', specially chartered by one of the competing bands, in which an ophicleide, as large as a village pump, appeared to hold the post of honour, and dingy Sax-horns were nursed by rough-looking musical nurses, as if they were children of priceless worth; past many pedestrians who were jolting down one hill, and toiling up another, on their road to the scene of the musical prize fight; past all the signs of a not very distant attraction, down into the valley, across a stone bridge, and up through a dark fir-wood, we drove up, at last, to the door of the principal inn in Lofthouse, the Golden Lion.

There was nothing very peculiar in my appearance, except that I was an alien and a stranger in a place unaccustomed to public visitors; but my general impression is, that Lofthouse was wholly unable to make me out. Several dogs came up to examine me, lolled out their tongues and wagged

their tails, and then disappeared in one or other of the open doorways. A large shopkeeper, in a small general way of business, surveyed me from between a number of miscellaneous articles that stood in his shop window amongst dead blue-bottles and expiring wasps. A young lady in full evening costume, even to a low dress and crinoline (the daughter of a leading draper in the village), came out to her father's door, and after surveying me for several minutes, retired into the dim recesses of the shop, totally incapable of making me out. Another young lady at a rival draper's, who was adorning herself for the mid-day festival, after examining me several times, for periods of from one to five minutes each, from her chamber window, continued her toilet, at last, in despair, because she, too, was unable to make me out. A number of boys with vacant faces and open mouths, who stood motionless in the road at the front of the Golden Lion door, with their heads bent forward, their hands thrust into their pockets, and their knees disposed of at different degrees of inward inclination, were also perfectly unable to make me out. An aged bandy-legged man in drab cloth gaiters, who came to, and went from, the threshold of an opposite doorway, like the figure over a Swiss fancy clock, was probably making himself quite ill in his fruitless endeavours to make me out. A tottering old woman in an adjoining doorway was another observer of

the single alien and stranger, and she, like the others, was incapable of making me out.

The Golden Lion and its landlord were far above any such idle curiosity on such a busy day (for them), and while they were as ignorant as any one in the village as to who I was, or who I might be, they made me pretty clearly understand that they cared very little to know, as long as I stood out of the way. The usual hotel form of "showing" me "to a room," was certainly gone through, and I availed myself of it to deposit my great-coat, and my travelling-bag; but, finding that six Lofthouse men were engaged at the window in hanging out a flag, and that preparations had been made for turning this and all the other sleeping apartments into tap-rooms at a later period of the day, I gave it up, without a murmur, into the hands of resolute festivity, and proceeded down-stairs to the old-fashioned stone-floored parlour, that was also kitchen, tap-room, and bar.

Here I found the first band that had come into Lofthouse to try its musical skill, very busily engaged in trying the Lofthouse rum and ale; while, hanging up by hooks from the ceiling, amongst many bundles of dried winter herbs, were several cornopeans to be used in the harmonious fight.

The usual plan of band-approach appeared to be, to stop about two hundred yards outside the houses, and then to tramp in, playing a defiant march.

Upon drawing up before the Golden Lion, the players formed a circle, and finished off with another defiant tune, which seemed to say to all Lofthouse, "We are Farndale; beat that if you can!"

Before the arrival of another party of combatants, these performers retired to one of the drinking rooms, where the landlord gazed upon them with a silent but fatherly interest, having more regard to what they drank than to what they played.

They sat upon tables, and along benches against the wall; they puffed pipes until they were almost invisible in clouds of tobacco-smoke; they disposed of their brass instruments in the window, until the hostelry looked, from the outside, like a military trumpet-maker's shop. Their faces were flushed with beer, if not with anticipated triumph, and they were encouraged to seek victory by the presence of certain gentle beings who had sworn to wear their colours to the last. A couple of Yorkshire "Arabs" had somehow drifted up from some city of large population in the county, and, while one offered to clean boots at a penny a pair, the other stood up with his nose just above the beer mugs on a table, and sang a popular song, until a member of a brass band extinguished him with the mouth of a yawning ophicleide. I am sorry to have to admit, in all candour, that these were the only two boys in the village who seemed quite capable of making me out.

I now give the rules and the programme, as they were given in excellent print to me:—

REGULATIONS.

"That the district shall embrace all villages within a distance of thirty miles. That each band intending to compete shall consist of not more than fourteen members, each member having been enrolled in the said band at least three months before contesting. That each band shall have the privilege of choosing one piece of music, the other to be selected by the judge. That no professional shall be allowed to play with any band."

LOFTHOUSE GRAND VILLAGE BAND CONTEST.

On Friday, September 30, 1859.

N.B.—Placards announcing the name of each band, as they play, will be displayed upon the platform; reference then can be made to the programme. The order of playing will be decided previously by drawing lots.

PROGRAMME.

Test piece, to be played by each of the bands—"Grand Parade March" . . . . . *Jones.*

AISLABY BRASS BAND, 9 Performers.—Leader, Mr. R. Corney.

Selection . . "La Somnambula" . . . *Bellini.*

BILSDALE BRASS BAND, 12 Performers.—Leader, Mr. W. Hart.

Selection . . . "Twelfth Mass" . . . *Mozart.*

FARNDALE BRASS BAND, 11 Performers.—Leader, Mr. Potter.

Selection . . "Lucrezia Borgia" . . . *Donizetti.*

GUISBORO' BRASS BAND, 12 Performers.—Leader, Mr. Bannister.

Selection . . "Il Trovatore" . . . . *Verdi.*

LOFTHOUSE SAX-HORN BAND, 10 Performers.—Leader, Mr. J. Walker.

Hallelujah Chorus . . . . . *Handel's Messiah.*

The contest will commence at one o'clock.

The first three of these bands were what is called "moor-bands;" that is, a troop of performers

collected in a straggling district of cottages, extending from ten to twenty miles, the inhabitants of which have proportionately few opportunities for practising music together. The Guisboro' band has the good fortune to come from a town that boasts a railway terminus, and which can scarcely be called a village; while the Lofthouse Sax-horn company was the only strictly "village" band that was entered for the musical contest.*

The whole village, though it could not quite make out all the important points in the combat, was quite willing to stand still, with its hands in its pockets, and to give itself up to gazing at everything and everybody, and the moderate dissipation of an extemporized fair. The daddies (and what village is without a dozen of them?) crawled up and down the hilly street with blinking, smiling satisfaction; while the grannies (and what village is also without a dozen of them?) conferred with each other across cottage garden palings. The children assembled round every object of the slightest show or interest, in speechless astonishment, and listened wherever there was one man speaking to another.

The individual who seemed to take in the whole festival with a quiet grasp of intellect, was a dusty,

* Mr. Enderby Jackson, of Hull (the great promoter and organiser of these bands), tells me that there are village bands in almost every village in Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Lincolnshire, and that they abound in the mining districts of Cumberland and South Wales.

yellow-coloured quarryman—or something of that kind—who was returning home to dinner from his morning's work. He said nothing, although he stood in the midst of a (Lofthouse) crowd; but the twinkle of his eye, and the saucy tilt of his ragged cap, spoke volumes, even without words. His jacket was flung over his shoulder, in the form of a soldier's breast-belt; and in his hand he held dangling a tin can, like a small oil-can, which was most probably devoted to his daily allowance of tea. He looked as if his body had been buried in clay three parts of his life, without destroying his sense of enjoyment, or his belief that whatever is, is right. The children gathered round him, as round one who was evidently good at thinking, and who might possibly give utterance to something that it would not be well to lose. Their expectations, however, were doomed to be disappointed, for, after regarding the Golden Lion, the assembled bands, and the spectators at the opposite cottages, with another eye twinkle, and another meaning smile, he walked slowly down the village hill at the Whitby end, as he had walked slowly up the other hill at the Redcar end, swinging his tea-can jauntily at his side, and dragging his heavily-booted legs after him, but making no further sign.

At length the time approached for the musical struggle, and the order was given to desert the rum-glass and the ale-can, and to march to the meadow,

where the judge and the orchestra were ready. This was done in noble style, each band of performers playing its own favourite march, in its own favourite way, and being headed by its own favourite musical vivandières. This time it was the turn of the oxen in an adjoining paddock to be thoroughly astonished, and, after regarding the troop of visitors and players with becoming gravity, they evidently came to the usual Lofthouse verdict, that they were not able to make it out. The four or five policemen from the different villages were disposed of round the meadow, and their first duty, as usual, was to chase unruly boys, who dodged behind hedges instead of paying sixpence, and coming in by the legal entrance, up a lane.

The judge got into a bathing-machine, which had drifted up from the coast on to the hills, to serve him as an observatory, and being duly fortified with apples and a bottle of liquid, he gave the necessary and long-expected sign to begin.

It was Guisboro' that led off first (by lot) with Mr. Jones's March; and, without pretending to be critical, I may say that the performance more than equalled the composition. The Lofthouse Sax-horn band then took possession of the arena, and showed the judge and the visitors what village amateurs can do. Both of these companies were dressed in something like uniform, which may, or may not, have had an effect upon their musical unity; and it was

not until the Aislaby players stepped on the platform that I, for one, amongst the audience, had an opportunity of regarding a lonely Yorkshire moor-band, standing up without any adventitious aid. Without inquiring too closely into the daily occupations of the performers (which, I am given to understand, may range from farming to iron-working, and sometimes to keeping a shop), I should say that a journeyman baker, two regular canal bargemen, three Dudley colliers in their Sunday clothes, a working blacksmith hastily summoned from the forge, and two Scotch tally-men, provided with dingy trombones, cornopeans, Sax-horns, and ophicleides, would complete the picture of the Aislaby band. The Farndale and Bilsdale moor-bands that followed them, were twin brothers in appearance; and I say this with no disrespect to these humble students of a refined accomplishment, but rather to their infinite credit. They were all working men of the hardest working class, and they manfully showed like what they are.

When Mr. Jones's March had been decently blown through the five brass bands and then got rid of, the second test of comparative merit took place; the performance of the operatic and sacred selections. The same rotation was again observed, and after Guisboro' had led off with a number of airs from Il Trovatore, the Lofthouse band followed with the Hallelujah Chorus, and the moor-bands of Ais-

laby, Farndale, and Bilsdale respectively, with selections from La Somnambula, Lucrezia Borgia, and Mozart's Twelfth Mass. To say that the performance of these difficult pieces approached perfection, would only convey an untruth, but it far exceeded the ordinary standard of civilization existing at the places from which the bands were drawn. The Bilsdale band, although playing with less spirit, perhaps, than some of their rivals, had a keen sense of harmony, and a rich mellow tone, which suited my taste even better than the performance of their more successful competitors. It was a sight to see the leader of this band, a short and sunburnt young man, like a country "boots," dressed in a waistcoat that might have been a piece of leopard's skin, except that the ground, instead of being brown, was crimson, and the spots, instead of being black, were a very prominent white. There were several other moor-flowers in this and other bands, with a taste for very similar waistcoats; and not the unapproachable Jullien, in all his glory, could compare with one of these.

To see such conductors waving a cornopean, while "T' Twel' Mass o' Mozart," or "S'lectshuns fram t'Narma," as they were conversationally called, were being played in rather slow—and consequently Lofthouse—time, was a hopeful sight for those who travel through the moorland district in the constant fear that some ruffian will "fettle their mouths with

a brick." I do not pretend to say, that because *Ah, che la Morte!* is blown upon a Yorkshire trumpet, fighting is altogether a stranger to Yorkshire fists, but I think that the man who conducts the melodies of Bellini, although in a crimson waistcoat and corduroys, is not likely to bite off his neighbour's ear, or to gouge out his neighbour's eye, and is very likely to have a humanizing influence on some of his cultivated brethren, besides.

The excitement when the prizes were declared to be awarded in the following rotation—

Lofthouse	First.
Guisboro'	Second.
Farndale	Third.
Bilsdale	Fourth.
Aislaby	Last.

was sufficient to show that the cudgels and the wrestling ring had not altogether been exchanged for the harp; and the cheers and groans were sufficiently loud and antagonistic to warrant the presence of the police-officers, who had come from every village within twenty miles. The final musical assault of the day was the triumphal return of the five bands, in the order of their adjudged excellence, to the devoted and expectant Golden Lion, where all the dirty glasses and mugs of the morning had been washed for the afternoon, and where fresh

barrels of ale were set under groaning machines to satisfy alike the demands of the victor and the vanquished. The noise that these enraged and delighted musicians made, as they marched into the village, all playing at once, and all playing different tunes, amidst the barking of dogs, the shouting of children, the cheering of friends, the groaning of enemies, can only be compared to Bartholomew Fair in its palmiest days, when every showman was beating his gong, and declaring that he alone was the possessor of the original spotted boy.

TWO TRAINS OF PLEASURE.

Most people ought, by this time, to be able to answer the following question: What is an enjoyable excursion train; or, as the French phrase it, a train of pleasure?

Ten minutes under a mountain; half an hour down a coal-mine; to Huddersfield and back in a day, or to Newcastle and back in a day and night: glimpses of cathedral cities; hurried dinners in coast towns; dim, fleeting views of docks, and ships, and harbours; glances at lakes; whirlings past monuments; superficial panoramic lessons in the topography of your native land, to say nothing of bilious voyages across different parts of the Channel—are these the kind of excursions which reinvigorate the exhausted frame, and are the long, toiling lines of carriages which carry you entitled to be called trains of pleasure?

This kind of amusement (if amusement it be) has been growing more cheap, and consequently more popular, every year, especially under the wild competitive battles which have arisen from the mutual jealousies of different railways. Leeds may not only be a distant, but a somewhat uninviting

industrial town, until the chance of going there and back for half-a-crown invests it with charms that are wholly irresistible.

Wolverhampton will not be offended if I say that it is not a modern Athens, and yet it can always command its streams of excursion visitors, when its railways are disposed to be liberal. Your clerks or your shopmen despise the dissipation which their fathers enjoyed, and when they now hear the chimes at night it is often in a railway carriage. They leave their work and their ledgers on a Saturday at noon, and when they return on the following Monday it is, perhaps, from the borders of Devonshire.

I have travelled a good deal in excursion trains myself, and I have seen the distances of journeys gradually lengthened from tens of miles to hundreds of miles, without the periods of resting time being in any degree altered or extended. While I am perfectly ready to admit that a large amount of instruction may be derived from such wild marchings into the bowels of the country, I am not so ready to admit that there can be much recreation in becoming a volunteer courier or an amateur Queen's messenger.

I am at this moment slowly recovering from the exhausting effects of two excursion trains, and I put it to any sensible person whether they may fairly be considered trains of pleasure. Number

One was an excursion deep into the central mining districts of my native land, and it involved the following labour and proceedings:—

I was called by a policeman at five A.M.—no great hardship this, perhaps, as it was on a fine July morning. I had been shaved overnight, so that my toilet was not very irksome; and, about half-past five or a quarter to six, I closed the door of my house with a hollow bang behind me, and sallied out into the silent street to mingle with yellow-faced, sleepy-eyed, worn-out constables, early breakfast-stall keepers, and hurrying workmen. The air was clear, as it generally is at this hour and at this period of the year, and I had my reward in seeing my common-place parish church looking perfectly lovely through the transparent medium. A quiet walk of three-quarters of an hour brought me to the railway station at King's Cross, from which my train of pleasure was advertised to start at seven o'clock precisely.

Having half an hour in which to get my breakfast and select my place in the train of pleasure, I order some coffee at the refreshment counter, and proceed to regale myself. I cannot sit down, from a fidgetty sense that I have no time to spare, and I make the thick fluid and dry biscuit more repugnant and indigestible by repeated glances at a large clock on the wall before me. At last I am found seated in my train of pleasure, a quarter of an hour

before it is likely to start—my carriage being one of many vehicles, and I being one of about four hundred passengers. Not many minutes after seven A.M. we steam out of the station, and, after a splendid run of four hours at express speed through the flat country, and past the red-bricked towns, and the square churches which line the Great Northern Railway, I find myself at Doncaster. My two other railway companions in the first-class coupé carriage have hardly spoken the whole way through. One has looked out of the window as if in a trance, and the other has done nothing but read a newspaper.

Finding myself in Yorkshire at an hour when I usually rise from the perusal of my morning papers, I am naturally led to ask myself what purpose has brought me there. I knew, before I started, that my journey had something to do with coal-mining and the coal-trade, but I am induced to search further and inquire again. I find that the directors of the Great Northern Railway had consented that, from the 1st of July, 1859, the produce of each of the various South Yorkshire collieries shall be sold with the name of the colliery, and unmixed with any other coal. The owners of the best coal regard this as such a boon that they have resolved to celebrate this separation of qualities by a train of pleasure to the "three pits," and free passes are issued to a wide circle accordingly. Behold me—

who know no more of the mysteries of the coal trade than others who like to burn good coal, when they can get it—at Doncaster, then, one hundred and fifty-seven miles by rail from London, as the first stage in my train of pleasure to celebrate the separation of the qualities.

Ten minutes being consumed in shunting the train and refreshing the crowd of visitors, we are again upon our railway road for the first of the three pits, the notorious Lundhill Colliery. Here it was that, on Thursday, the 19th of February, 1857, one hundred and ninety-two men and boys perished by the most fearful explosion that has ever distinguished mining history. Like the ruins of a battle-field, the signs of such a catastrophe are soon cleared away, but the widows and orphans remain. They remain to receive this train of pleasure with wonder, smiles, and shouts—a dense group of sunburnt women and children, whose clean caps and aprons look doubly and deceptively clean, brought out, as they are, by the background of black ashes, smoke, and coal-dust.

The visitors who are assembled to celebrate the separation of the qualities rush up a grimy ladder on to a grimy platform, and look down the smooth brick side of the pit's mouth. At their back is the engine-house, where the engine draws up or lets down the chain which supports the cage; and at their side, to the east, is the ventilation shaft, a

chimney that runs parallel to the descending shaft, and terminates at the bottom in a furnace. This furnace is never suffered to go out from the hour when it was lighted, as long as the mine is in active working and in need of air.

It consumes full an hour to let down the mass of visitors to the bottom of the pit. They take their places eagerly in the cage, like people who are anxious to get into a theatre, and they are sent down the hole into utter darkness at the rate of about eight miles an hour, and in parties of eight at a time.

After half an hour spent in looking about me, and especially in regarding a small colony of miners' houses near the pit, and recalling, in imagination, the sounds of wailing that must have come from their open doors and windows on that February day of mourning two years ago, I took my place in the cage in front of a pale-faced gentleman, who looked as if the signal for letting us down was the signal of death to him, and he was perfectly aware of it. Not a sound was heard, nor the whisper of a voice, as we glided down the perpendicular passage, except at one point, about fifteen yards from the mouth of the shaft. The top of the pit being on a raised platform, the chimney of the shaft is exposed above the ground for a certain length, and a window is made on each side, near the point where the chimney disappears be-

neath the surface of the earth, to give a little light during some portion of the descent. At each of these windows, leaning on the ledges and grinning through the grating, were a crowd of brown-faced orphans, and as the cage passed their faces, on its rapid road to the black passages where their fathers had perished, they greeted it with a combined, re-echoing yell of childish joy. Not only were all traces of the great explosion removed from the neighbourhood, but time had also removed them from these children's hearts.

When we had descended with giddy speed about two-thirds of the pit's shaft—a distance of about one hundred and fifty yards—a sudden check took place, in order to let us down the remaining seventy yards with greater care. The effect of this check was to cause an illusive sensation that the action of the machinery had been reversed, and that we were ascending even more rapidly than we had come down. Wild thoughts of utter destruction—impending danger—the intelligence of something wrong being discovered below—passed quickly through the minds of the silent, breathless human cargo, and there was not an adventurous excursionist in that cage who did not wish himself well out of it. A few seconds of painful reflection, and instead of the welcome daylight being seen once more, a sudden shock was felt—the whole structure had suddenly touched the bottom of the shaft,

and the travellers were dragged out of the cage and over a box-ledge by rough and unseen hands, to stand in the bewildering darkness of the Lundhill pit.

The next step in this train of pleasure was to grope your way to the lamp-room and procure a "Davy" to light you along the passages. Here the excursionists met in dark crowds, and celebrated the separation of the qualities by smearing themselves with oil.

To walk, bent nearly double, in a long straggling file for more than half an hour, and along about a mile of coal passage—called workings, boardgates, or levels—was the next step in this train of pleasure.

To avoid pinching your toes under the revolving rollers, for drawing ropes under your feet, or striking your head against many projecting snags of coal above, was another step in this train of pleasure. Another step was to get hold of a talkative boy, who was full of stories about the explosion, and to follow him to a forbidden part of the pit, called the waste workings, and see the outstretched mark of a man's form impressed upon the roof. This man must have floated up after the pit was filled with water to put out the fire, and the water was charged with lime to prevent decomposition in the one hundred and ninety bodies; and he left a white seal of himself to be the talk of the miners for many years. Very few excursionists availed

themselves of this step in the train of pleasure, and those who did—myself amongst the number—found themselves almost the last stragglers who arrived at the bottom of the shaft. We stepped into the cage to be drawn to the surface, and at about two-thirds of the ascent another check in our speed occurred, and we were under the impression that we were returning to the bottom, until we were undeceived by being shot out on the platform. The guard of the train of pleasure, and the train of pleasure itself, were waiting to receive us, and when it was believed that no more excursionists were left down the pit, we turned our backs upon the black mine, the miners' colony, the widows, and the orphans, and went onward to the second of the three pits—the Edmund Main.

At the Edmund Main another similar descent of visitors took place, with similar results; and those who did not leave the Lundhill pit begrimed with coal-dust, and in the condition of master chimney-sweeps, had now no reason to pride themselves upon their superior cleanliness.

After a moderate delay, the train of pleasure was again upon its road, to deposit the excursionists at the third pit—the Oaks Colliery. Here, all the machinery was actively employed in raising coal, so that those visitors, whose rough edge of mining appetite had not been taken off by the two former pits, were reluctantly compelled to satisfy

themselves with a mere survey of the surface. The owners and their representatives were very courteous and attentive, but the men, who are only paid for what they actually do, were very properly determined to push on with their work, in spite of the crowd assembled to celebrate the separation of the qualities.

Once more the train of pleasure was got under weigh, and this time for what is called the black Yorkshire town of Barnsley. As the King of Pandemonium is not so dirty as he is painted, I was not surprised to find Barnsley excessively neat, clean, and respectable. The town itself was white enough for all practical purposes; it was the visitors only—the celebrators of that mysterious separation of the qualities—who required washing.

Never before, perhaps, had such a demand for soap and water been made at the King's Head, and never had Yorkshire chambermaids been so flustered, hurried, and worried. Luckily, the crowd of grimy excursionists oozed out into the yard, and satisfied themselves with tubs, butts, and horse-troughs. In the hotel there were nineteen gentlemen, at one time, in one bed-room.

The cause of all this hurry and sudden desire to become purified was the next step in the train of pleasure—a public dinner (to celebrate the separation of the qualities) in the Town Hall of Barnsley. To find the Town Hall it was only necessary to

follow the dinner, which was being conveyed by a succession of hand-maidens from the hotel, before mentioned, publicly down the main street, and through the thronged market-place, on a full market-day, a distance, perhaps, of an eighth of a mile. The attendants looked rather flushed and bewildered, poor things; and the Barnsley public, with the market men and women, assembled to watch the combined procession of food and visitors. A stout young woman, who was bearing a pair of steaming roasted ducks along the road, was stopped by a greasy girl whose cap had been put on in a hurry, back part before, and who carried a vegetable dish. What the girl said, in the choicest Yorkshire dialect, must remain a mystery, but the stout young woman very properly replied, in the same dialect, that she could not be "worritted" on such an occasion. Who would care to be worritted when carrying a pair of roasted ducks along a crowded high street, about four o'clock in the afternoon of a summer's day?

Through the market-place, up some steps, through a large lower hall, strewn with vegetables and baskets, like Covent Garden Market, past a beadle, and up a stone staircase, and the excursionists found themselves in the Town Hall of Barnsley.

The dinner was substantial and profuse, and apart from the fact that the bulk of the diners were

from London, and the dinner was in Yorkshire, the travellers by the train of pleasure had no cause to complain, nor the county to feel ashamed. Stray coachmen served you, and ostlers placed dishes before you, as if they were handling feeds of corn, but that was of little consequence.

About five o'clock, however, when the separation of the qualities was proposed from the chair as a formal toast, and when the visitors found themselves nearly two hundred miles from home, drifting into the usual routine of a public dinner, with the prospect before them of having to return from Yorkshire to London the same night, besides doing other things that were on the programme of the train of pleasure, by the way, the slight absurdity of their position began to be faintly apparent.

The toasts, for all this, were received with all due honours; the convivial excursionists were got back to their railway carriages about half-past six P.M.; and about seven o'clock the whole train of pleasure arrived once more at Doncaster. Here the new church, a triumph of revived Gothic architecture, was to be seen, and the excursionists were accordingly allowed half an hour to see it. Some lingered at the station; others found their way to the borders of the churchyard; while others got into the building, and shocked the pew-opener by rudely mounting the pulpits. Finally, the whole of the stray sheep were penned up once more in their

railway carriages, the lamps were lighted, the train of pleasure was again upon its way, and—after investigating three coal-pits, going through a public dinner, winding up with a very small allowance of church to a very large allowance of coal and sack, and travelling nearly four hundred miles to do all this—the celebrators of the mysterious separation of the qualities found themselves at King's Cross some time about midnight.

This is an example of a well-meaning, hospitable train of pleasure treat, that was given to a number of visitors in accordance with the spirit of the age. Train of pleasure Number Two is another example of what is sold as recreation, at a time when railways are looking after the pocket-money of great people and small people.

To Paris and back for twenty-seven shillings by the short sea-passage route of Folkestone and Boulogne, allowing three clear days in the French capital at the time of the great Italian army and August fêtes, would seem to promise well, and did promise well—upon paper.

The first step in this train of pleasure was to procure a passport; a performance in which a lawyer or doctor is required to assist, by giving a letter of recommendation, in which the Foreign Secretary, for the time being, is moved to be ungrammatical, and sign himself "we," in consideration of two shillings; and in which the French Consul, in con-

sideration of four shillings and threepence more, is induced to indorse this ungrammatical ticket-of-leave for French travel. The passport being all right (as it very properly ought to have been, after the best part of two days had been expended in obtaining it), the next step was to get shaved overnight (an indispensable ceremony, if you wish to qualify for any train of pleasure), and to be called on the morning of Saturday, the 13th of August, at about six o'clock. I dress myself in a style that I believe peculiarly adapted to the country to which I am going, I take a close, stuffy, four-wheeled night cab, and render myself at the South-Eastern Railway terminus about a quarter-past seven A.M.

After a breakfast of the same tap of coffee that I tasted at the Great Northern Railway, with certain solid additions, supposed to be the proper fortification for a sea voyage, I take my place at a quarter to eight A.M. amongst many hundreds of my fellow-creatures in the train of pleasure, and in three hours, or even less, I am walking towards the boat at Folkestone. Nature, on this occasion, being disposed to be kind, the closely packed mass of human beings is taken across a glassy sea without an individual instance of sickness, and deposited in the tender, outstretched arms of the expectant French custom-house officials at Boulogne. After the usual ungenerous suspicions with regard to my small portmanteau, and the usual triumph of injured innocence

on the part of that very ill-used and necessary article of travel, I am thrown, a houseless wanderer, on the hot sandy streets of Boulogne, to be stung to death by touters from one o'clock at noon until eight o'clock in the evening. After several dinners, various drinks, a game at billiards, a fruit feast in the market-place, a walk upon the sands, and a bath in the sea—all nothing but various devices to pass the time; and all enjoyed uneasily, with a sense of lingering on the road—the train of pleasure is ready at last to receive us, and I take my place with the knowledge that I am about to travel all night upon the most sluggish railway in Europe—the Great Northern of France. To expect anything more than your legal place, to hope to stretch your legs, much less your body, are all idle dreams on such a journey as this. To-morrow (Sunday) is the greatest fête day that France has seen for nearly half a century, and a million of visitors are expected to swell the already crowded population. I begin to fancy that the present train of pleasure is another great mistake.

Night travellers are but sorry, hideous phantoms at the best of times, and what can I expect now? Wild peasants from French Flanders, both male and female, who speak a hoarse, guttural dialect of the Parisian language, as charming as Bolton English; a pale-faced Boulevard tailor's shopman, in a very tight-fitting dress suit, who reclines in one corner of the carriage, not far from

the flickering lamp, and who looks exceedingly ghastly with his head bound up in a white pocket-handkerchief; a couple of female peasants, with huge caps and enormous baskets, who look like English prize-fighters dressed up for chimney-sweepers' May Queens; a stout compatriot, who snores most vigorously when asleep, and who presents an absurd resemblance to one of Messrs. Barclay's draymen; another stout compatriot, a true native of Bethnal Green, who thinks and speaks most tenderly of the beer he has left behind him; some fish-women from Dunkirk, and some factory operatives from the neighbourhood of Amiens (the French northern Manchester), complete a choked carriageful of excursionists. What nodding varied shapes they assume, as the train of pleasure crawls along, as the moon looks in at the window, as the lamp gutters down, as the white autumn steamy mist covers the fields and trees like a deluge of water! What maniacs they look, without keepers, as they roll from their cells of carriages at a great refreshment station, rush along the platform, forget the number of their compartment, and shout out to missing friends as they clasp a long loaf of bread or a bottle of wine, and are hustled by the liveried half-police railway officials.

Paris at last, about half-past five on the Sunday morning, with half its population already astir, and its streets festooned with innumerable tricolor flags.

I obtain a one-horse fly with some difficulty (for is it not the great fête morning?), and drive to my hotel. My hotel, indeed! Anybody's hotel; everybody's hotel. They have been full to overflowing for several days, so has next door, and next door but six; so has another place of rest where I have been in the habit of stopping; so have several hotels that have been strongly recommended to me; so has the place where my father stopped before me. This is the great fête day, and I have come by a train of pleasure. I give up the fruitless search at last, and another hour finds me, a very dusty, tired, fish-eyed traveller, in very dirty, obscure, and (very likely) disreputable private lodgings.

I go out to be shaved; and the barber finishes me off rapidly and dangerously, for he is anxious to be off to the fête. I apply at a street corner to have my boots cleaned, and the shoe-cleaner is drunk. He shouts out, "Vive la France!" with a flourish of his brush, and falls helpless over his foot-box.

I wander about the crowded streets, and soon become aware that every cab, fly, and vehicle in the city is engaged for ever. I penetrate with difficulty on to the Italian Boulevard, and might have obtained a very good view of the military procession if I had paid seventy francs for a share of a window. I did not pay the seventy francs, and was consequently left to buffet with the mob. A standing on

a coach-wheel, a school form, or an upturned basket, was offered me, in the same style as at the Derby; but while I found the prices too high, I found the temporary platforms too low, and I declined the many eligible positions that were forced upon me. I saw the sunburnt, slouching, stooping troopers pass by, at different times, from different points of view, to the melancholy sounds of the military drums; and when I had feasted enough upon this spectacle, I sought for a dinner. Here, again, I was doomed to a bitter disappointment. My favourite restaurant could refresh me no more; it was crowded to the garrets; so were all restaurants; and I dined with difficulty.

Monday and Tuesday (the other two of the "three clear days") were passed in much the same manner; no vehicles were to be had, the theatres were free and crowded; and it was only towards the evening of the third day, near the hour at which my ticket ordered me to start on my return, that Paris began to assume its natural, comfortable, and proper aspect. At nine P. M., on the Tuesday evening, much worn in body, I again rendered myself at the railway station. There may have been a thousand people waiting for the train of pleasure, but they looked like twenty thousand. A body of soldiers, with drawn bayonets, was there to keep order, as well as a number of the usual admirable-looking armed Paris police. I

endured the crowd for an hour, and should have been much more happy and comfortable if the peasants who surrounded me had brought their trifling change of clothing in portmanteaus or carpet-bags, instead of in small egg-chests, and rude boxes with sharp corners, not unfrequently studded with nails. A slow filter through a gate and across a yard, then through another gate and across a luggage-room, then through a door, and we found ourselves jammed in the chief hall of the railway. Half an hour of this crowd and atmosphere was borne with different degrees of individual impatience, until a liveried official calmly announced that the whole affair was a mistake, and that our train of pleasure was waiting for us at the end of a calm, cool, narrow, and undiscovered passage.

A fight for seats; a carriage with the same mixture of travellers as before; a ten hours' night run, at about eighteen miles an hour, to Boulogne, with the garlic-scented head of a Picardy peasant resting asleep upon my shoulder (a journey that seemed to last for years); a pause of five hours in Boulogne; a calm passage of two hours across the Channel in a drizzling rain; a delay of an hour at Folkestone; and an arrival, after a fair run of four hours, at London Bridge station at about ten o'clock on Wednesday night; and my second train of pleasure was brought to an end. What advantage I obtained by going to Paris at such a fête time, and

passing two nights in a French railway carriage, I have not yet been able to learn, unless I went to patronize these wild, exhausting trains of pleasure, that form the chief travelling amusements of the present day. I am not a Tory obstructive, nor do I hold any heretical opinions with regard to steam; but when I see the crowded list of long and rapid excursions that are daily advertised upon the city walls, I look back, perhaps with regret, to the time when Hornsey Wood House was considered a day's trip, and when Epping Forest formed the eastern boundary of my wildest attempts to travel.

A PHANTOM OPERA.

On the evening of the twentieth of April, 1858, I went to the Opera-house in Covent Garden, provided with an order for admission by the kindness of Mr. Gye, the proprietor. I arrived at a quarter-past seven o'clock, humming an air from the Huguenots; the Opera I had seen placarded all over the town; to commence precisely at eight. When I got out of my cab in Bow Street, I fancied for the first time that something was wrong. I was put down before a dingy hoarding, above which arose, against the clear moon-lit sky, a tangled web of scaffold-poles, ropes, ladders, columns without capitals, capitals without columns, pails, baskets, hods, planks, and shouting men. I entered at a rude workman's door, inside which stood a door-keeper, sheltered by a small hut upon four wheels. I delivered the order of Mr. Gye with some hesitation, but was immediately relieved from any doubt by being requested to follow a guide who would conduct me to my seat in the building. I resumed the humming of the air.

We threaded our way with difficulty through

heaps of sand, small hillocks of mortar and cement, earth-sifters, spades, pick-axes, carts, horses, blocks of stone and piles of timber, towards a low, cavernous, dimly-lighted opening, at the foot of the lofty side-wall of the theatre. In the dusk, we passed troops of men, marching steadily forward with heavy loads on their backs; and I noticed that the prevailing style of evening dress was fustian trowsers, tucked up over laced-up boots, surmounted by a clayey, whitey-brown shirt. As we approached the building, I heard a loud sound, but not a shout of harmony. It was composed of the metallic ringing of trowels, the echoing blows of various-sized hammers upon various-sized bodies, the dabbing of cement upon walls, the soft simmering of smoothing-boards, the harsh grating of saws, the full whistle of large planes, the falling of masses of timber, the iron rattle of pulleys, and the hum and shouts of men busily setting all these things in motion. Stooping under the low arch, and crossing a tottering plank, I left my companion, and found myself standing in the pit of the great Opera-house. No white and gold decorations; no satin elbow cushions; no velvet seats; no crowded orchestra with green-shaded lamps; no full, bulging curtain; no galaxy of wreathed beauty; no chandeliers, no lorgnettes; but the aspect of a dismantled cotton-mill — a mixture of Lisbon after the great earthquake, and the ruins of the Coliseum, with the chaotic work-

shop of a Leviathan building-contractor turned into them.

I have seen many Opera-houses in Europe; but never such an Opera-house as this. I climb up as best I can, from the earthen passage that runs round the house (a fop's alley that would drive fops mad, so studded with mortar-heaps, rough timber, and tenpenny nails), and obtain a footing upon a fortuitous concourse of planks that form the elevation of the pit. Up from the centre of the flooring into the distant roof runs a rough pine-tree pole, round which is a large hoop of gas, which lights the building efficiently, but rudely, as if it were a travelling circus. Up in the roof is a star-shaped scaffolding, with many thousands of planks, looking like paper-knives, or old-fashioned broad matches, radiating in all directions.

There is a moderate audience as to numbers; but their conduct is singular in the extreme. The Opera is essentially a lounge: the Opera-goer is essentially a lounger. There are people who work at Opera-going, as they would work even at opium-eating: people who run with industriously-idle curiosity after particular vocal stars; people who barricade theatre-entrances from the middle of the afternoon; people who struggle painfully up staircases and along passages—individual embodiments of that fearful, restless Anglo-Saxon energy, which, merely to look upon, drives the pure lounger to

distraction. The body of Opera-goers are toned down by refinement and aristocratic ease. They toil not, neither do they spin.

But here their simple temple of taste, luxury, and melodious idleness, is given over to the frantic hunger for exertion of the flannel jacketed, blue-shirted maniacs of toil. Turn my eyes wherever I will, instead of the bright eyes and beaming faces of my lovely country-women, I see dirty men engaged in a fierce war with inanimate matter. They strike it sometimes gently, sometimes heavily, with hammers; they drive into it long nails; they chip it with sharp chisels; they cut it with sliding planes, they swing it by means of ropes in mid-air, they hurl it from giddy elevations down into yawning earth-gulfs below. Sometimes they pause a few moments for rest or consideration; but only to renew the attack with more energy than ever.

I look towards the stage, and find it nothing but a number of thin planks, sticking upwards like hop-poles. Far beneath these planks are dark brick arches, and black passages, under which little knots of labourers are conversing mysteriously, and in and out of which tramps a procession of dirty powdered men with hods of mortar upon their shoulders. A bare wooden proscenium hangs suspended from the rafters over a dark earthen gulf, where the orchestra should be—long, broad, and deep enough to swallow all the opera bands of Europe. Stretching

up on each side, and across the back, is the scooped-out expanse of the stage, looking like the undeveloped plan of one of our large public squares. There are lofty, solid blocks of clean, new brickwork; large archways and gaps showing the thickness of the walls; heaps of dirt, dust, and brick rubbish; iron girders; and strong rude galleries running high up along the walls. Above all, there are more fan-like coverings of planks, through which dangle dusty boots and legs; from which men slide down ropes into the dusky pit beneath; and from lath to lath of which men hop, serenely unheeding their danger; pursuing their allotted task of labour, even to the gates of death. At the back of the stage, underneath the painting gallery, on a raised platform, intended for the machinists' workshop, is a long row of men in paper caps, cutting, smoothing, and hammering for their lives, by the light of a line of flickering gas jets. It is the only grouping in the theatre that presents anything like stage effect; and, although I have long given up all hopes of the Huguenots, I still look in this direction for a chorus taking the form of a benediction of the trowels.

Climbing over ragged timber, running up and down tilting planks, jumping over prostrate poles, bonneted by overhanging rafters, hustled up dark, uneven, unfinished staircases by dusty labourers, deafened by the ceaseless din of the discord of work, my boots and trowsers soiled with whitewash

and mortar, choked with a dust compounded of a dozen different materials, I begin to feel that I, too, am *not* an Arcadian, and I thread my way painfully and timidly to the galleries above the stage, in search of comparative repose. I find the galleries but I find no rest. The din reaches me there, if anything, with increased force; and, as I look from the stage towards the interior of the house, I see the little hives of industry in full activity. Up in the galleries, amongst the cobwebs of wood-work, are little glimmering lamps; centres of nodding heads directing upraised arms that strike and pause, and pause and strike again. Carrying my eye round the circle of the boxes, the novelty of the sight is still more apparent.

What is it that I am looking at? Is it a sectional view of some model lodging-house; the interior of an unfinished emigrants' hotel at the Bendigo diggings; or a theatre erected in the wilds of Ballarat to provide the imported luxury of deal boarded private boxes for successful miners, who are determined to have the genteel thing, and hang the expense? In one bare wooden box, seated on a rough stool, is a melancholy looking lad, gazing vacantly at the monotonous performances below, and unconsciously imitating the aspect of some fastidious musical critic, who is dissatisfied with the execution of a new German singer, or the composition of an hitherto untried opera. Another box

has an air of domestic comfort about it, savouring of the model lodging-house. A hat and a coat are hanging up; and, in addition to a stool, there is something that looks from this distance like a table. A good apartment and fitting for a single young man. In another compartment are two men in familiar conversation, and common clothes. They may be discussing the merits and demerits of the entertainment; and they diffuse for a little distance around them the idea of working-men attending a working-man's Opera, at a working-man's Opera-house. In other neighbouring boxes are men engaged in nailing up and papering the walls; and this carries us back again to the idea of an emigrants' hotel. Some are coming in or going out of doors; some are in their shirt-sleeves; some are talking from the open, unfronted apertures to their friends in the boxes above or the pit below. Generally the favourite means of access from the gallery to the lower portions of the building, in this very primitive theatre, seem to be by ropes and ladders extending from the one to the other. The line of what I should consider the dress-circle, presents the appearance of a row of shops; unopened as yet in a new settlement, and awaiting patiently the different trading stamps which are to be set upon them by enterprise and capital.

The floor is alive with heads, the roof is alive with legs—heads and legs of dark, light, black,

white, brown, and slate-coloured men. I am disturbed in my gallery, and my reverie, by an insidious labourer, who first makes himself and me thirsty by sweeping a lot of dust, shavings, and broken brick together in a corner behind me, and then hopes that the workmen may have the pleasure of drinking my "'onner's 'elth."

"How many of you are there?" I inquire, resigning myself placidly to this begging box-keeper.

"Eight 'underd, yer 'onner."

"Eight hundred at a shilling a-piece. A hundred shillings is five pounds. Eight times five is forty. Forty pounds for beer? Take it, and be happy!"

A shout of joy rang through the building. The heads wagged furiously on the floor beneath; the legs kicked violently through the roof of planks above. The lights began to die out, one by one. The performances were over for that evening. Sudden silence came upon the weary ear at last. I joined the stream of earnest, steady labour pouring through the dark passages, over the sand hills and under the sheds, into the street once more.

No matter what I see now, or what I may see hereafter, I shall always believe, to my dying day, that all that army of eight hundred trained labourers, was, on the evening of the twentieth of April, eighteen hundred and fifty-eight, employed

with all its will and all its strength—not in erecting—but in pulling to pieces, stone by stone, splinter by 'splinter,' and brick by brick, the mighty structure of the Italian Opera House in Covent Garden.

A WORKING OPERA.

At three minutes to eight o'clock, one Tuesday evening, a few weeks after the night of the Phantom Opera, and I find myself upon the great stage of the Italian Opera-house in Covent Garden. The building is now completed, and the piece upon which the curtain will rise in a few minutes is the well-known tragic opera of the "Huguenots." Before the curtain is the white and gold, and blue and purple decorated area, which contains the picked representatives of the refined society of the middle of the nineteenth century.

Behind the curtain, and around me, are the men and women who will, to the best of their ability, give a representation of the stern and rugged Paris society of the latter half of the sixteenth century. They are collected from many countries: sallow Italians, high-cheeked Frenchmen, stout Germans and Flemings, tall thin Poles, Tartar-looking Hungarians, and the smooth-faced natives of our own land. Some are chorus-singers; some merely supers, or men who, having two legs, two arms, one head, and one body, let these physical advantages out for a small nightly rental, to be arrayed

in any costume the stage-manager may direct, and the stage costume-maker provide—to hold any flag, gun, sword, staff, halberd, battle-axe, or goblet, that may be placed in their hands; and to be arranged in any position by the pantomimic director, upon bridges, in market-places, turret-windows, or princely halls; exhibiting in the mass every stage expression, from stern unrelenting warlike fury to easy conviviality. The super, if he does not bring to his labour a very high order of intelligence, has an almost military sense of duty; and I firmly believe that if directed to take up an attitude as one of the ornaments of the pediment, in the portico outside the stately building, he would do so, unflinchingly and mechanically, posing like an oriental fakeer, or an ancient column-stander, exposed to all the variations of a severe and fickle climate, until the curtain of death rang down upon him at his post.

The chorus-singer is not so manageable an individual; he will sing, but he will not act. If he is a fat Italian, it only makes matters worse; for the old native indolent spirit can never be overcome by all the Anglo-Saxon energy in the world. Ask Mr. Harris, the best and most active of stage-managers, who with all the tact and experience, all the industry and determination, all the polyglot denunciations at his disposal, finds it a most difficult and heart-breaking task to infuse some appearance of life into

those masses that stand like a row of butts in a brewer's storehouse; musical, most musical, but at the same time most melancholy. The chorus-singers' most common notion of dramatic action is the throwing up of a single arm, as if hailing a cab in the public streets; his extraordinary notion is the throwing up of both arms, as if voting totally and energetically at a public meeting. Having exhausted these two very obvious, and not very elegant or elastic modes of pantomimic expression, he relapses into a state of profound, undisturbed physical quietude and self-possession. Out come his notes as melodiously and as correctly as the most exacting and fastidious conductor can desire. His voice is at the entire service of the management, but his attitudes, never; and what little vitality is infused into such inert masses of vocalisation, is due to the introduction of mere pantomimic members of the chorus.

I pass on to the centre of the stage, and find it apparently a scene of hopeless entangled confusion. Machinists' labourers are rushing madly about, bearing what appear to be large solid blocks of architecture in their arms. Others are setting the elaborately-painted walls and deep-windowed recesses of the mansion of the Count de Nevers, the scene that opens the opera. Tables are being arranged covered with fruit, flowers, golden vases and drinking-goblets. Neat pages are walking

listlessly about with wine-jugs in their hands; and the Catholic noblemen settle down one by one out of the surrounding confusion in their appointed places at the banquet, awaiting the rising of the wall of canvas that conceals them from their audience. Their legs form an unbounded field for observation, tightly cased as they are in the long coloured stockings of the period. There are red, blue, black, white, slate, green, pink, and scarlet legs of every variety of shape: some short and thick; some long and thin; some knotted like the trunks of oak-trees; some stiff and unbending; some springing and elastic; some a little—just a little—inclined inwards at the knees; some inclining in an equal degree outwards; some—the white ones—straight and equal all the way down, like altar candles; some like large parsnips, others—the red ones—like large carrots; some very pointed at the knees; some flat in the calves, as if their possessors had been too much in the habit of lying supinely upon their backs, with their faces turned upwards; others sharp in the shins—so sharp that it is a marvel how any stockings can be found sufficiently strong to resist the cutting powers of such members. The click of the prompt bell is heard, and the opening notes of the opera swell up from the finest orchestra in the world, muffled, however, to my ears by the folds of the intervening curtain. The old Huguenot chant merges into the opening

chorus; the curtain rises, and the two halves of the great opera-house—the stage and the audience—are made acquainted with each other.

While the banquet, with all its attendant music, is going on, a hundred busy workmen are preparing the second scene, the château and grounds of Marguerite de Valois in Touraine. At the proper moment, when the first scene has closed, the walls of the Count de Nevers' mansion are torn asunder, as if by an earthquake, by the troop of men who swarm behind them, and are hurried into recesses—called scenery-docks—at the side; the tables, the goblets, the flowers, and the chairs are swept away at the same instant; and the turreted castle, the river, and the high, broad, solid flight of steps in the noble gardens of Chenonceaux, are displayed to the audience. The men with the curious legs crowd behind the scenes, or flow out of the different entrances, their places upon the stage being now occupied by ladies in flowing muslin robes, the maids of honour to Marguerite de Valois. Melody follows upon melody; the plot thickens, under the struggling outbursts of the chorus, the warbling of the principal singers, and the surging sea of sound from the instrumentalists in the orchestra; the stage gradually fills with the people of the drama; the great roll of gray canvas comes slowly down, like a mountain mist; the distant music floats away, and the first act is over.

The illusion of the scene is destroyed at a blow. The palace and gardens of fair Touraine are no more; a hundred men in caps and shirt-sleeves are running about the stage, hustling the sombre Huguenots and the gay Catholics in the costume of the sixteenth century; bumping against the titled loungers in their French hats, white neck-ties, and patent boots—carrying turrets, trees, parts of staircases, fragments of houses, and beds of flowers in mid-air, shouted at by the excited stage-manager excited pantomimic director, excited machinist, excited scenic director. Bit by bit the chaos takes the form of something like order; two old solid inns are built up with pieces numbered and labelled like the parts of a church manufactured for exportation; a chapel is raised in the background; the Seine is filled in; the stage is grouped with all the characters that usually attend a continental Sunday fair; the curtain again rings up, and a picture of life in the Pré-aux-Clercs of old Paris is presented as a basis for the second act.

The stage, under the new mechanical arrangements, is, in nearly all cases, "closed in"—that is to say, the old plan of wings, and "flats which slide on from each side, and join in the centre, is given up, and every scene is built up, as far as possible, in a solid form, the whole being shut in by side-pieces. The picture thus presented to the audience is with the performers enclosed in a semicircular

form occupying about two-thirds of the available stage; and those who are before the foot-lights, with those who are behind the scenes, are left to enjoy their respective areas of comparative privacy undisturbed by each other.

It was while availing myself of this seclusion from the tragic interest of the story that was engrossing the large and fashionable audience in the front of the house, that I found a Huguenot soldier relieving his overcharged theological feelings in one of the passages, by throwing a modified back-somersault, technically known in the acrobat profession by the title of "flip-flap."

Outside the charmed circle, or semicircle, of stage effect, was the usual crowd of supers and chorus-singers, interspersed with a few persons like myself, and half-a-dozen policemen, backed by the clean new brick-walls of the building, and the dark staring windows—black from the intense light within the house—that look out upon the neighbourhood of Covent Garden. Within the charmed circle, aided by the highest order of scenic art; aided by some of the most dramatic music that was ever given by a composer to the opera stage; aided by two of the greatest vocal artists that ever breathed the breath of life into the melodies of this immortal work, is it to be wondered at, that, looking through the gauze-paned window of that room in the castle of the Count de Nevers in the well-known third act,

I should, even from this point of view, be completely impressed with the illusion of the scene, feeling like one who, in the fatal month of August, 1572, gazed upon the murky walls and heavy hangings of some Catholic noble's mansion; saw the hooded monks and nuns streaming in through the arched doors; heard the blood-thrilling blessing of the sacrificial swords; and saw the anointed assassins slink stealthily out into the streets of old Paris to commence their fearful work. And when Raoul, in that passionate scene that follows the benediction, upon hearing the deep-toned bell of St. Germain, rushes to the same window and throws it open, although he gazes in reality upon a blank wall, a few grimy stage-carpenters, a policeman, and a female dresser, waiting with a cloak for her mistress when she comes off after the present duet, who shall say when they look on that pale face, and in those two glaring, startled eyes, that he does not see all he professes to see—the bodies of his helpless friends shot and cloven down in the narrow streets, or floating by in the dark waters of the Seine, with their upturned faces covered with blood? And even when the final leap from the window is taken, into the midst of the motley group who await him, it is at least a minute before he shakes off the influence of the scene, and returns to the more mechanical business of the stage.

The fourth and final act is not hurried over or

slurred, because, after the great spirit and interest of the third act, it presents something of an anti-climax. A richly-tinted windowed chapel is built up, inside which the full tones of an organ are heard, and from which the variegated light streams upon an enclosed yard, where the final massacre takes place. Part of a cathedral is seen, and outside the yard is a Gothic shrine, beyond which are solid blocks of houses forming the opening to a long, narrow, winding street, at the end of which glisten the waters of the Seine, lighted up with the pale glimmer of coming day. At the side, some of the men with the curious legs are seen once more, stationed to fire the final volley that ends the opera. At a given signal, it is done—the startled female members of the company are deafened for a few seconds with the roar of musketry, the stage is partially filled with smoke; the last faint notes are gasped out, and the great curtain falls for that night upon the opera of the *Huguenots*.

As I pick my way towards the stage-door of the theatre, through the fourth ruin of the evening—the pulling-down and packing away of the final scene—I feel that the faces I have seen under pumpkin-shaped helmets, beef-eater cloth caps, black wide-awakes, and puritan buff hats, will come across me at intervals for the next four months, sitting at café-tables, standing at the corners of theatrical streets, and even meeting me in situations where it

will be a long, sore, painful, but unavoidable tax upon the memory for me to recollect under what circumstances and in what places they have appeared to me before.*

* This paper is reprinted (by permission) from "Chambers's Journal," No. 243, August 28th, 1858.

A MORNING CALL ON A GREAT PERSONAGE.

WHEN, some years ago, the first clearance was made in that marshy ship-building yard at Millwall, and the plan was laid down of that huge vessel which bore the name of the Great Eastern up to Tuesday, the third of November, eighteen hundred and fifty-seven, but which on that day, from the lips of a young lady named Hope, took the title of the Leviathan*—there, on the borders of that river, which continually bears upon its bosom the full stream of commerce which flows unceasingly to and from the ever-restless, hungering city—in the face of Deptford dockyard, with all its old naval associations—within sight of those long webs of masts and rigging which mark the outline of the crowded docks—within sight of those old, weather-beaten warrior vessels, strong in a strength that we hope we shall want no more—within sight of those Hospital cupolas, beneath which repose the maimed and aged defenders of wooden walls, the representatives of a past time, was implanted the first stake of a great experiment, which, if it

* The name has been again changed to the "Great Eastern."

proves successful, will undoubtedly inaugurate a new era in the naval world. We may bid farewell to tar and bunkum, to barks, brigs, schooners, sloops, and frigates, and welcome huge machines that savour more of the engineer's factory than the shipbuilder's yard. And thou, my unsteady friend of Ratcliffe Highway, with those peculiar trousers, so broad and loose about the feet, and so tight and narrow round the waist, with that short blue jacket, and those small, low shoes, with that black neck-tie slung so carelessly round the bronzed open neck, and that shining cap stuck so wonderfully at the back of thy head—am I to part with thee, with all thy dear characteristic ways, thy tavern broils, thy extemporaneous hornpipes, thy rollickings upon dangerous elevations on the tops of cabs, driven by reckless, joyous cabmen, thy utter disregard of money, and thy love for rum, tobacco, swearing, Eastern music halls, comic songs, arguments with helpless policemen, and lodgings somewhere about Stepney, or Saint George's in the East? Am I to see thee fade slowly from my familiarized, if not enraptured gaze—fade, as I have seen the stage coachman fade before thee—and give place to a respectable, well-conducted, but utterly lifeless something —a mixture of the stoker and the supercargo?

I am a passive instrument in the hands of fate, and I may add in the hands of science; and on the morning of that drizzling, cheerless November

day, heedless, even ignorant of the importance of the occasion at which I am about to assist, I follow the stream of expectant sight-seers, and find myself, in due time, upon the dismal island—the Isle of Dogs. Over the trembling wooden bridge that divides us from London, properly so-called, and on through the mist and steamy exhalations, and along the sides of the green ditches that skirt the roadway, up the crowded, noisy, bustling street, hung with a few dingy flags, and I approach the long, silent monster, stretching along above the house-tops—above the tree-tops—and standing in impressive calmness, like some huge cathedral. As I enter Mr. Scott Russell's yard, I contrast the calm of the great vessel—the sullen silence of inert matter—with the eager bustle and hurry of the two thousand workpeople who are employed to assist in the launch.

I am in the empire of mud. I am assisting at a festival in which mud forms the prevailing element. I am surrounded by muddy navigators, muddy engineers, muddy policemen, muddy clerks of works, muddy, reckless, ladies, muddy directors, muddy secretaries; and I become muddy myself. Mud—soft clayey mud—is the distinguishing feature in this Island of dirty Dogs. Not to be muddy is to argue yourself unknown, and to be confounded with the unimportant rank and file of visitors, who number, in and around the yard, and upon the river,

and the opposite coast, full one hundred thousand souls.

The birthplace of the Leviathan presents rather a chaotic picture. Lying about in the clay, like plums in a pudding, are large screws, crowbars, broken hammers, bits of iron, cogwheels, sheets of metal, scaffold poles and blocks of timber, big spike-nails, felled trees, iron girders—pieces of cable, chain, pulleys, and boilers, into which people creep out of the rain.

There is the hum of many voices upon land, and the shouts from the river, the music and ringing of the bells on the opposite shore, the hissing of steam, and the clatter of the engines. Careworn officials pass me, who have been hard and anxiously at work for many weeks, and who have been up all night. They look at me with a sorry welcome, wondering how I and so many persons can take an interest in what appears to them an irksome task. There are groups of stout, powerful navvies, Lancashire and Yorkshire, who are not occupied to-day in the work of the yard, and different classes of lounging workpeople, some in blue jackets, and some in clayey brown shirts, and some in fustian suits, and very greasy caps. These are the men who have been working for so many weary months upon the great ship's shell; and they are there with their wives and their children—babies in arms—to witness the success or failure of their handiwork.

Some of the women have brought their husbands' dinners, and they wait, looking curiously at the arrangements around them, until the repast is finished upon a piece of old iron, or inside a boiler. Some of the dinner-bearers are not so fortunate in finding their husbands in the crowd at the exact moment when they want them, and they run about bewildered in the general din, bemoaning the fact that the dinner is getting cold. The sparrows seem to be aware that something is going on of far more interest to them than the gigantic launch, and they assemble in great number, chirruping for the crumbs that may fall from the poor man's table. One very clean, neat old widow, after some difficulty, finds her son, a very greasy, muddy lad, with a good deal of lampblack about his face. To the old lady's great concern he does not seem to care about his dinner, and she is sure that he must want something after being up all night about the yard. The lad has been stimulated by some fellow-workmen with a large allowance of beer, and this, together with the exciting event of the day, has made him so indifferent to food, that the old lady, very unwillingly, is compelled to leave the carefully-prepared comforts to take their chance in the course of the afternoon. Such domestic events go on, no matter what great interests are hanging in the balance. Dinners were brought to workmen by careful wives and mothers

at the building of the Tower of Babel, and why not at the launch of the Leviathan? The welfare of her greasy, muddy son, was of more moment to the clean, old, widowed mother, than the great, suller carcase which one hundred thousand people were so anxious to see floating on the waters.

On all occasions of this kind you meet with a good deal of character, brought out by the surrounding circumstances. There is the practical man, bloated with all the traditions of the past, but a hopeless blank as to the future; who would rather cling to the inventions and appliances that we have, than fly to others that he knows not of. He is, at the present time, a good representative of those men, laughed at now, who backed a Margate hoy against the first locomotive engine that ever ran on rails, and who considered the man who first proposed to light London with gas a dangerous lunatic of the Guy Fawkes' breed, against whom every man's hand ought to be turned who did not wish to see his home in flames, and his children calcined.

Such men as these were very plentiful on the morning of the third of November, standing in the centre of a little attentive group, and delivering such oracular phrases as, "Wood, sir, never did it before, and it will never do it again!" confidently setting their opinions, the result of five minutes' hasty, superficial, and untrained examination, against the plans of men who have thought and dreamed of

nothing else than the great work before them, day and night, for many weary years.

Then, there were fussy men—probably shareholders in the Company to the extent of one small share—who were taking out the value of their individual subscription in a minute examination of every part of the complex and powerful machinery, and who were begging the visitors to keep back, as an attendant clown clears the ring for a tumbler.

Then, there were important men of stately forms, clad in double-breasted coats and waistcoats, who awed you with authoritative glances like incarnate beadles. They must have been directors, or sworn friends of directors, for Board-room was written in every line of their important countenances.

Of more real importance in connection with the event of the day were those two muddy, anxious, ordinary working men, looking like a decent master carpenter, and his attendant foreman, whose minds and bodies were too much occupied to afford time or inclination for any pose plastique of official dignity. They were Mr. Brunel, the engineer, and Mr. Harrison,* the captain of the Leviathan: the former almost bent double with fatigue, and the latter with every particle of the salt-sea captain drawn out of him during his long residence in Mr. Scott Russell's ship-building yard.

* Both of these gentlemen are now dead.

Then, there were fidgeting men, who tried to catch the eye of persons in high authority, upon the strength of having met them once or twice somewhere at dinner. You could hear such men saying to friends: "I know Brown very intimately; very nice fellow, Brown; if I could only get hold of Brown for half a second, he would put that matter right in an instant." "That matter" generally referred to a rebuff they had met with from a muddy policeman, who prevented them rushing into a position of imminent peril.

Then there were pretty little groups of elegantly dressed ladies, carefully escorted by an attentive cavalier through the wet, slippery clay, over splintered timbers, and across chains and cables, to some position supposed to be more than ordinarily interesting, for the purpose of exclaiming: "La! Amelia, isn't it wonderful!"

Then there were adventurous spirits amongst the directors, who would get into positions of danger, to the great horror of their wives and daughters; and who seemed disposed to counsel the whole Board, with the Chairman at their head, to go down with their capital and their venture to a man.

The river, about two o'clock in the afternoon, presented the appearance of a solid mass of human beings outside the limits prescribed by the Leviathan authorities. Jolly young watermen were in charge of crews such as they had never seen since the first

steamer was launched upon the Thames. There were coal-barges, lumpy Scotch and Hamburgh steamers, Dutch galliots, skiffs and cutters, barks, schooners, and sloops, neat little Chelsea steamers, worn-looking Woolwich boats, ambitious Gravesend crafts, police barges, floating-engines, mooring barges, fishing-smacks, fruit vessels, light jaunty yachts, and grimy colliers from Sunderland. I think I see the little, dirty, naval drudge on board the Bounding Betsy, from Shields, looking up with awe and admiration at the great vessel which overshadows him, and wondering if he will ever be on board such a craft. There must be some charm in the sea for this poor lad, which our wisdom does not enable us to measure. His life seems hard enough: his berth is grimy; his hands and face are grimy; his food is grimy, for he crunches the coal-dust as he eats his pork and greens; his captain is grimy; the cook, who is also the chief mate, is grimy; and the two able seamen are grimy. He has to obey orders from every grimy mouth, and occasionally he gets a stout cuff from a grimy fist. He has little or no bed during the short grimy voyage, and his life is passed amidst coal-dust and water. Yet the lad is happy and cheerful; and if his old mother wishes to keep him on land, she must chain him up strongly to the cottage-door. I wonder whether the captain of the Leviathan was ever such a boy? I know many great captains who were.

A general spirit of reckless daring seems to animate the majority of the visitors. They delight in insecure platforms; they crowd on small, frail, house-tops; they come up in little cockle-boats, almost under the bows of the great ship. In the yard, they take up positions where the sudden snapping of a chain, or flying out, under severe pressure, of a few heavy rivets, would be fraught with consequences that they either have not dreamed of, or have made up their minds to brave. Many in that dense floating mass on the river and the opposite shore would not be sorry to experience the excitement of a great disaster, even at the imminent risk of their own lives. Others trust with wonderful faith to the prudence and wisdom of the presiding engineer, although they know that the sudden unchecked falling over or rushing down of such a mass into the water would, in all probability, swamp every boat upon the river in its immediate neighbourhood, and wash away the people on the opposite shore. Everything about the yard and the vessel is large, and rough, and strong; and many who contemplate these things become, in imagination, large, rough, and strong, likewise. If the feeblest visitor in the yard were suddenly asked to lift half-a-ton weight, or hold a chain against a tugging power of six horses, he would turn up his cuffs and try.

The mass that has to be launched, or pushed into the water, weighs twelve thousand tons. It is

as high as an ordinary church, and exactly the length of the Art Treasures' building at Manchester; or, to convey the dimensions more approximately to the mind of a Londoner, we may tell him that the length, breadth, and height of the Leviathan corresponds very nearly to the length, breadth, and height of Great George Street, Westminster. This measures the mere shell of the vessel; for, when it is finished and has its crew and cargo on board for voyaging, it will be more than double its present weight. The problem to solve, then, out of the pen-and-ink abstraction, and the undisturbed solitude of a civil engineer's office, and in the broad light of day, before a hundred thousand eager, trusting, sceptical, anxious spectators, is, to let down an iron hull gradually into the water, six hundred and eighty feet (or nearly one-eighth of a mile) long, eighty-three feet broad, sixty feet high, and weighing nearly twelve thousand tons. This is the task that Mr. Brunel has undertaken. He stands in a very different position from that of a great military or naval commander on a grand emergency: they employ great forces to destroy; he employs them to preserve. On one side he has the capital of the Company, to the extent of a million, under his charge; and on the other, many thousands of visitors to shield from injury or death. This task, also, Mr. Brunel has undertaken.

The army that he employs to carry out his orders is rude and ill-organized, about two thousand in number, unaccustomed to work in unison, and, strong and hearty as they look, practically useless without the aid of machinery. That aid the engineer has availed himself of very largely. Two steam-engines, stationed at each end of the yard, opposite the head and stern of the vessel, operate by drawing in chains working round barges moored in the river, and acting to draw the vessel down its launching-ways. Four other barges are moored in the river, working drawing tackle equal in force to two hundred and fifty tons. These, with the hydraulic pumps used on the land side to press the vessel forward, are the forces employed to overcome the reluctance of the Leviathan to move. There it stands, like a sulky monster, firm in its two cradles, at the top of its launching ways, which slope down gently to the water's edge, well covered with lamp-black and grease. The machinery used to keep the great vessel back, and prevent its plunging too hastily into its new element, injuring itself and every one near it, is two enormous cables, the links of which are as thick as a man's thigh; rolled round drums as high as a small house, and governed by four windlasses, two to each drum. This, with the two thousand navvies and workmen, standing like terriers at rat-holes, waiting for orders, is the power placed in Mr. Brunel's hands to use for one object

—the launch of the Leviathan, twelve thousand tons weight—on the third of November, eighteen hundred and fifty-seven, at one o'clock in the day.

At that hour, everything being in readiness, the operation commences, and for some few minutes no result is visible. All at once a loud, united shout is heard, and those at the stern-cable see the head of the vessel slide some little distance down the ways. In an instant afterwards—before the shout has died away—the huge mass quivers from head to foot, and the stern part follows the lead of the head with a grinding crash and sullen roar, and in two seconds, before the dazzled eyes of the people have scarcely realized the fact, the mighty vessel has slipped six feet down her ways, like a boy down a slide. The stern cable drum savagely pays out its gigantic chain, and one of the windlasses revolves with frightful rapidity, hurling a dozen poor men, who are unprepared for the sudden movement, like acrobats, into the air, and in another moment they are lying bleeding, senseless, and writhing on the ground. The men at the other windlass—a mere handful—see that everything depends upon their redoubled efforts, and a dozen strong, earnest arms, aided by machinery, pull up the retreating monster —the twelve thousand tons—with a sudden check, and a quiver felt throughout its enormous length and breadth, as if it was the most tottering horse, or the most shaky cab that ever came out upon a

night-stand. The engines stop, and a rush takes place towards the injured men; and while they are being carried to the hospital in the arms of their fellow-workmen—two of them to die, and baptize the Leviathan in blood—the shouts from the river and the opposite shore came wafted on the wind, from men who little know how much they are indebted to that handful of resolute men at the stern windlass.

After the lapse of one hour, the work is recommenced, but the surly monster refuses to move. One of the drawing-chains snaps under extreme tension, and the hydraulic pressure-pump gets out of order. At half-past two o'clock the launch of the Leviathan, as far as the public are concerned, is finally closed.

As I join the reluctant crowd, and file slowly out of the wet, muddy yard into the outer chaos of drunken sailors, overflowing beer-shops, streaming houses, misty marshes, laden omnibuses, splashed broughams, independent cabs, and close, drizzling rain, I feel that, as the experiment of the day has demonstrated the power to propel and the power to check, the first important stage in the development of the great enterprise may be considered as secure.

GREAT EASTERN POSTSCRIPT.

WITHIN the last twenty years there has arisen a new profession. It hangs upon the skirts of literature without being literature. It requires a strong chest, a power of doing without sleep, of sleeping upon shelves, stones, clay, or hurdles, an observant eye, an even temper, and a good memory. It is the profession of seeing and describing everything in the character of "our own correspondent."

The men who follow it with love and determination are not cold, calculating men; they are men who live only in action, who feed only upon excitement. They belong to the same race who have wandered over parched deserts, who have sailed out into unknown seas, who have thrown themselves amongst howling savages, who have sat over powder mines to gather information, and to spread it, when gathered, before an ever ravenous public. The risks they run are measured in thousands of pounds sterling by careful actuaries; the pay they receive is liberal, but no more in proportion to this risk than the twopence halfpenny (or one quarter of a day) which the common soldier is paid, when he storms a battery, or throws himself upon a hundred bayo-

nets. Their enterprise is undoubted: their political economy is utterly rotten. A crown of glory is always ready for their hot and impulsive heads:—a foolscap garnished with fevers, broken bones, corns, bunions, dirt, and chilblains.

As a dabbler in this eccentric profession, I speak from some experience. I began with a giddy race on a puffy locomotive, I may end with being blown out of the mouth of a cannon to describe the sensations. I have done many wild things in my time, and I am still alive to some that are wilder. My last essay was in the experimental trip of the Great Eastern, and I have returned in the full possession of all my limbs, if not in the full possession of all my faculties.

Before these pages can possibly be laid before the readers of All the Year Round,* there will not be one of those readers unfamiliar with almost every incident of the voyage. As my purpose, however, is strictly to record what *I saw with my own eyes on board the ship*, and not what was brought to me by well-meaning friends, or well-instructed messengers, it is possible that my Great Eastern Postscript may not be wholly uninteresting, or without value.

The first thing that puzzled me in the voyage was the refusal of the directors to permit my joining the vessel at her moorings in the river. I was to be tolerated at the Nore, but not at Greenwich. I had

* This was written September 12, 1859.

about twenty companions who were also anxious to sail in the good ship for a special public purpose; but that purpose, it was decided by the Board, did not begin until she got to Sheerness. Some of the most energetic amongst "our own correspondents" believed that the Thames, the start, and the course down the river, were things, above all others, to be seen and to be recorded, and some rowed after the floating island in cockle-shell boats and barges, while others took deceptive conveyances overland, and found themselves in Kentish hop-fields, listening to the flutter of birds and the familiar crack of the September gun, when they should have been floating on the river, and thinking of nothing but water, tar, and Rule Britannia. A select party attended to directorial instructions to deliver themselves at Stroud about four o'clock in the afternoon of Wednesday, the 7th of September, and were taken on board the small theatre at Chatham in the course of the night, instead of the great ship Leviathan, off the mouth of the Medway. Their vessel had come to an anchor at Purfleet about two o'clock in the day, and the four speculative spirits who got out at the Erith station, but took their chance of boarding the vessel, had every reason to be satisfied with their irregular proceeding. I was one of the number.

The voyage from a muddy pier at Erith to the companion-ladder of the great ship was one of some

difficulty. A leaky boat had to be prepared with row-locks which were cut out of the broom-handle belonging to a Kentish Arab, or mud-lark, on the beach; and the passengers were expected not only to pay a high price for the voyage, but to bale out their crazy craft with a rusty pint pot. One half of the course was performed in this manner, and the other half in a powder-barge, which came up and charitably rescued us. In a quarter of an hour more we were under the sides of the great ship, while our credentials were sent up for examination, and passed through a black hole, like a trick trap in a pantomime. This was one of the cargo portholes, we were given to understand; and it was comforting to see that emblem of law and order, a London policeman, standing in charge of this ship entrance. Though blue, he did not look naval; nor did the ship from this point of view; it had the appearance, to my thinking, of an immense floating House of Correction.

At last we were admitted, and I found myself standing, for the first time, on the deck of the floating island.

I had learnt before I started, from certain statistical records of the vessel, that her length over all was nearly seven hundred feet; that her length of beam was eighty-three feet; that the length over her paddle-boxes was one hundred and twenty feet; and that her height from the bottom to the top of

the upper deck iron was fifty-eight feet; but all this gave me a very faint idea of her size. My first impression, on walking about her decks, now they were in all the confusion incident upon her first start into blue water, was worth more than all the comparisons I could ever have made from bare figures.

I was standing on a raised street that had suddenly been built in the river. I will call it Upper Thames Street. Upper Thames Street after a shower of rain, and a heavy visitation of coal-dust. There were ropes, and pulleys, and engines craning in cargo from barges; there were pools of water filled with rotten bunches of deal shavings, and chips of oak wood; there were coils of thin rope, and lines of thick rope; casks full of ale, of herrings, of ship's provisions; deep gulfs of holes gaping for trusses of bed and bedding, or for careless passengers, through the upper and lower decks far down into the base of the huge ship; great heaps of chain lying about amongst planks of wood, amongst heaps of bricks, and many sacks of potatoes. A dozen of these potato sacks took up as much room as all the correspondents who were refused admission, for the present, on board the ship, and who were running madly up and down the North Kent Railway, or dining in some musty hotel in the ancient city of Rochester.

The state of the ship at this time was a hopeless muddle. No common man on board connected with

the ship seemed to know where he was, what he was doing, or to what department he belonged. Bodies of rigging hands pulled feebly at ropes, and uttered plaintive sounds, but with nothing like a will, an effect, or a sense of duty. Below there had been a grand early dinner in celebration of the successful towing of the Great Ship Company's whole capital thus far down the river, and many supplementary banquets were still being spread and devoured in the chief saloon. The enterprise was at rest, having passed all the dangers of Discount point, near the Blackwall bend in the river, and it stood motionless with its dark hull, its bare rigging, and its five short funnels, for glasses to be levelled at it from the Kentish hills, or for groups of men and women to watch as they walked along the swampy Essex marshes. Most of the visitors had departed by train to London, with a view of returning at different hours of the night. These were unruly lodgers, who availed themselves early of the latch-key privilege, and the watermen who clung round the ship, like floating barnacles, had reason to congratulate themselves on a splendid harvest.

The first great difficulty I had to contend with was to find my berth; the next great difficulty was to find a bed-room steward to help me. I was to be known by a certain number. I was to eat according to that number, and to sign wine-tickets with the same arithmetical signature. That number was

645, which represented a first-class berth, and as night approached I thought it advisable to seek for it. There was nothing very unreasonable in this, although the bewildered bed-room steward seemed to think so. If it had been any other number than 645 he could have found it, he thought, without difficulty. Would 220 do as well, or 730, or 102, or nought and carry one, or six times three is eighteen? I was sorry to give so much trouble to a man who was unacquainted with the plan of the ship; but I thought it best to seek for my proper place, having a strong objection to be turned out of bed by an indignant stranger at some unknown hour of the night or morning. The steward procured a candle, and we began to examine the vessel.

We went down a broad staircase amongst the cellars of Lower Thames Street; and we went up-stairs again, in another direction, and down-stairs once more in another. We passed many carpenters, who were driving nails into walls, or sawing blocks of wood, or arranging fittings. We disturbed the repose of many jack-planes which were reclining in unfinished berths, and we interfered very much with the toilet of several workmen who lived in the places they were engaged to finish. We went into compartments containing three-shelf beds, two-shelf beds, and six-shelf beds; compartments without sofas, and compartments with sofas; compartments with portholes through which we could see the dark

line of country on the river-bank, and hear the ripple of the water; and inner compartments where the bed-shelves were painfully close to the door, and the ventilation of a more than doubtful character. The bed-room steward was evidently taking his first unwilling lesson in learning the topography of the ship, and I was profiting by the same experience in a much more cheerful temper. The journey taught me that the fore-part was, in this vessel, constructed so as to be the best part of the ship; that the dining and drawing saloons were built along the centre, and that the sleeping apartments clustered in quadruple rows, and double tiers of cells round the sides of the floating island. When 645 was at last found, it was in the possession of a troop of contractors' men, who had made it so dirty, and had so perfumed it with tobacco, that I felt no desire to disturb them. If a printed notice on the door had not given them some show of authority for being where they were, they had taken the most efficient means, as far as I was concerned, to secure themselves as masters of the situation.

Once more, then, the weary, bewildered, flustered bed-room steward retraced his steps, being met at every turn by persons who wished to know where they were; who told him to put a can of water into 223; to see that no one took unlawful possession of 818; to remember that 117 was engaged for Mr. De Pass and family during the whole

series of voyages; and to call 614 at six o'clock A.M., and not to forget the clean pair of Wellington boots, and a can of hot shaving-water. I began to relent in my persecution of this unfortunate servant of the company, and I took the first berth he offered me, after this, in a sort of Manchester warehouse, filled with unopened trusses of blankets under the grand saloon, the number of which was 444, an easy number to remember. Immediately opposite the door of this apartment was a large square structure, which went from floor to ceiling, and a couch upon which I saw a cool night's rest in perspective if I disliked the ventilation of my substituted cabin. The large square structure was that portion of the fore main paddle-engine-funnel, which stood between the second and third decks.

Having devoted so much time and exertion to the discovery of a sleeping berth, I was rather disappointed on finding that sleep was not an article supplied by the company on board their floating island. I am not a restless man, but I am unable to slumber within hearing of the siege of Sebastopol, the workshops of a hundred active Tubal Cains, the barking roar of some great steam monster puffing up a pipe as broad as a main sewer, the ceaseless blows of a steam water-pumping engine, and the fretful tapping of an iron chain against the iron casing of the vessel. It was not necessary to add the barking of a dog to this,

except to fill up the intervals between the louder noises of the floating island.

The sights of the early morning on deck were the arrival of the pilot as usual in a dress-coat, and the heaving of Mr. Trotman's patent anchor. Why all pilots should attend to work a vessel in opera costume I shall never understand; but why the patent anchor should be very obstinate in moving from the bottom is much more clear of comprehension, when I remember that the Admiralty have set their faces against it.

The obstinacy of the anchor in moving was a fault on the right side, and it gave me an opportunity of observing the working of an entirely new motive power in mechanics. It is called piccolo power, from "piccolo," a small flute. The upper and lower capstans are manned by a crowd of sturdy men, and the poles only begin to move, and the anchor to rise, when the small flute is played by an attendant Orpheus in a blue jacket. The tune is supposed by the ignorant to regulate the steps of the men, but no sensible person can be led away for a moment by this shallow opinion. I shall prepare a paper upon piccolo power for an early meeting of the Royal Society.

Another of the sights on board was Mr. Gray's well-known invaluable patent machine for adjusting the ship's compasses. For those who were not capable of understanding the scientific use of this

apparatus, there was a Michael Angeloesque lion on the outer case, which would always be worth its cost at any Art Union in the country. To those who had no taste for high art, science had kindly addressed itself in an humble and attractive cloak, and the case of the machine was suggestive of a brass retort for brewing hot elder-wine, or a highly-advanced baked-potato can.

Wandering down below, I came suddenly upon a small imitation of Newgate Market, the meat-house of the floating island. It was tolerably full of slaughtered carcases of various kinds, some stowed away like mattresses, and it showed me that only the servants of the company were allowed to set the ship on fire. Our candles were properly taken away from us by the bed-room stewards at ten o'clock the night before, and we were left in the dark to grope our way to our couches. Here, at eight o'clock in the morning, was a candle that had been stuck against a block of wood, and that had burnt down below the level of its dangerous socket. How long it would have been before it caught the wood-work it is impossible to say, but I extinguished it at once, without waiting to test the experiment.

Just above this meat-house was the grand saloon, the Versailles, or rather the Italian court of the ship, an apartment that had consumed much capital in its elaborate and Crystal Palace-like

decoration, that might, perhaps, have been more navally expended. A number of carefully-painted panels, divided by large plates of solid looking-glass, by the richly-curtained alcove doors that led to nests of berths, and by the berth window-holes cut out of a wall of golden flowers, were very pleasant things to look upon; but the whole of this apartment was a gilded sham. It had nothing like sea-going comfort about it; its space was limited for so large a ship, and its many mirrors were engaged all day and night in deluding the passengers as to the extent of their chief sitting-room. The couches are placed round those two highly-decorated and beglazed funnel shafts, which stood at each end of this Italian Court upon the water, a couple of smiling volcanoes. As you looked in those glittering mirrors to adjust your cravat, or brush back your flowing hair, you might have seen the dim outline of a death's-head peering over your shoulder.

Behind their deceitful faces was a steaming mass of destructive water, ready to explode at any moment. Their duty was to act as concealed funnels; their construction was to make them concealed boilers. The water constantly being passed through their outer and their inner surface (a space like that which would be made by putting a pint seed measure inside a quart measure), was a shield which protected the loungers in the ship's drawing-

room from the heat of the inner, or furnace-funnel, and a feeder of fluid, at the same time, to the boilers below. This water was boiled in its progress, and passed into the boilers warm instead of cold for engineering purposes, and the whole safety of the thing was provided for by a valve as large as a man's hand. In theory it was beautiful; in practice it has failed. From the stopping of a valve, the water-chamber became a closed boiler of explosive steam, and the result was an accident (as everybody knows) which would have destroyed the vessel but for the extreme solidity of its construction. This solidity of construction would have been no consolation to most of the passengers if the explosion had happened at the dinner-hour on Wednesday, when their banquet was spread in this apartment, nor to the ladies in their drawing-room just beyond, if it had occurred a couple of hours later in the evening, when the band of the floating island was beguiling the time with a concert. The fault was a workman's fault, and upon the unfortunate workmen the full weight of its consequences has fallen.

As we passed Gravesend, on our voyage to the Nore, on Thursday morning, the whole county of Kent seemed to be assembled in piers and gardens to watch our progress. The people looked like beds of flowers as they sat motionless on the land, and the ships in the river were bending down with

the human fruit on their decks and in their rigging. By degrees the two coasts became misty, as they receded obliquely on either side; and we steamed out of the river cleft-stick at the full speed of our engines, which gave us thirteen miles an hour. At the Nore our anchor was once more let go, like a gigantic diver, into the sea, with a roar like the heavy rumble of thunder; the water for some distance round was turned into a frothing well of champagne, and it was some time before its excitement subsided. Our dinner, on this occasion, took place in the chief dining-room of the ship, an apartment divided from the grand saloon by an intervening kitchen, and running, with a supplemental chamber, past the paddle-boxes, under the first and second decks and along the centre of the floating island. The construction of this apartment was, in the main, the same as that of the chief saloon; only one funnel, however, belonging to the screw engines, passing through it from ceiling to floor. The other two funnels, further aft, which appear amongst the masts of the vessel, belong to the same engines, while the two funnels fore (one of which was destroyed) belong to the paddle engines. The dining saloon was cramped and confined, like the gilded show-room, and round the sides were the same doors, areas, passages, and windows belonging to berths, like the lower section of any ordinary houses in an ordinary street, except

that the windows were square holes without any glass in them. I passed the greater part of the night looking at the pictures upon deck—at the brass-faced moon shining through the rope ladders—at the lines of rigging which seemed to cross the hazy sky, like many rows of black rails—at the blinking yellow lights off different parts of the coast—at the silent men on watch, who paced the deck, or leant lazily over the deep sides of the vessel—and at the groups of tarred and greased riggers, who clustered thickly round the hatches of the sea-going Italian Court, listening to the band music down in the ladies' saloon. The next night, at the same hour, the scene was far different.

On the morning of Friday, the anchor was weighed, for the second time, by piccolo power, aided and abetted by the singing of the men. Those men who were most musical were least useful in pushing against the capstan poles with their chests, as the latter operation is not favourable to good singing. About a dozen men seemed to go round between the poles, as if they were taking a little gentle walking exercise. It is true they were nothing but mere outriggers, the regular crew having received a small payment on account, which they were supposed to be spending in the traditional sailor-fashion at various out-ports. The discipline of the ship was sheer higgledy-piggledy, and no one seemed to feel this more than Captain Har-

rison, who was not the commander, except by courtesy, until the vessel arrived at Weymouth. The floating island had not yet received the sailing certificate of the Board of Trade, and was not yet formally handed over by the contractors to the proprietors. For all this, the shareholding interest was very strong on board, and the visitors were told by one of these gentlemen, when a spot of ink was dropped upon a cabin table, "never to forget the fact that they were guests of the company."

The morning brought with it a stiff gale of wind, and the promised steadiness of the floating island was tested more severely than it was ever thought likely it would be in the Channel. If the shares were half as steady as the vessel they represent, the shareholders would have every reason to be satisfied with their enterprise. The speed was undiminished at half power, according to the engineer's report, and also according to the pilot's measurement. The motion was nothing but a side-rocking motion, scarcely felt in the centre, without any pitching, and this is all that has been provided for by the lamp-swinging apparatus and other things in the cabins. These calculations may possibly be upset when she comes to the vexed question of the long Atlantic swell in rough weather, and I leave them to the test of experience.

There was quite a little Stock Exchange on board in the persons of the principal shareholders,

and operations were in all probability made as she rounded Par Point, or ploughed rapidly along the Channel in sight of the white cliffs of Premium.

If the wind has the credit of playing many strange tricks with vessels at sea, it certainly ought to have the credit of playing even more strange tricks on the deck with the passengers. It causes them to put on unsightly disguises, as if they were giving a comic entertainment, and were coming up, half discovered, from behind a green baize table in the characters of a number of those fancy creations, which must appear as strange to those who know the world as an African Earthman or a Zulu Kaffir would appear in a drawing-room. The wind not only causes such passengers to envelop themselves in transformation caps, but it alters the very aspect of their faces. It pinches up the cheeks, it reddens the nose, it dishevels the hair, and almost prevents the son from recognizing his father.

A storm of rain is even more remarkable in its effect upon the ship's officers and the ship's passengers. Coming up from below, just after a sharp and sudden shower, I found the huge vessel entirely in the hands of a few oil-skin pirates. The director of the engines—the most gentlemanly of men—was not to be recognized in the black, wet, shiny, coal-meter on the paddle-box; and generally the floating island seemed to be inhabited by a race of men who were partly fishermen and partly sewer-

keepers. An hour, with a little sunshine, soon restored Upper Thames Street to its ordinary condition, and brought out the Rotten-row loungers once more upon its surface.

One great comfort experienced in walking upon the deck of the great ship, was the impossibility, as it seemed, of getting in anybody's way. You might look over the side without being hauled away by a rope, or walk down any passage without interfering with the work of the vessel. Six hundred persons were said to be on board, but no one was in the least aware of it. The hardy traveller, who rejoiced in sea-legs that had never been lost, and who loved to pass his days upon the paddle-box, might have taken fifty people up with him, without getting in the way of captain, engineer, or pilot. The latter gentleman, a short, sharp man, with a very shrill voice always coming through a bright speaking-trumpet, and who was always in a restless state of movement, never complained for an instant of being interrupted. If you went to perform the common but forbidden operation of speaking to the man at the wheel, you were only left in doubt as to which man you should speak to, because there were a dozen of them. They stood directed by an officer, in a square steering-house, with windows in front, and looked like a squad of marines who were going through some exercise. There were patent indexes, and many other officers, communicating with each

other along the ship's length, but you might walk for hours before they were forced upon your notice. You might wander to the large glass skylight over the engine-room, and look down on a slow-moving mass of green iron and bright, oily steel, as large in appearance as temple columns, or the Marble Arch at Hyde Park; but the working engineers were invisible, far down in the gulf of an engine-room beneath, which was reached by clean network galleries, like the staircases of a great conservatory. You might look down the deep, square stoke-holes on deck, like the shafts of coal-mines, and see nothing through the narrowing Jacob's ladder of gridiron bars but a red glare across the bottom; and hear nothing but the roaring of engines, and the ringing of iron upon iron, or of iron upon stone.

You might go to the extreme head of the vessel, and gaze at the dull, misty coast, or the frothy water, and amuse yourself with a strange upcast of wind, which came so strongly up the sides of the vessel that the weight of a child would have been sustained upon it, as a pea is sometimes blown upon the top of a tobacco-pipe. Looking along the ship from this elevated post, you saw her whole length and breadth, with her rows of boats hanging over like a fringe on each side, her level deck, her upright masts, her restless pilot, and her more restless funnel-smoke, which was beaten down by the gale, and beaten up, and twisted about like a help-

less, struggling weathercock, in all directions. The Joint Stock Company (limited) is on board, unlimited and happy. She walks the waters like a thing of life. For the present; only for the present.

The regular dinner had been finished about ten minutes; the time was between half-past five and six P.M., on Friday, the 9th of September, 1859; we were passing Hastings, and Belshazzar's feast had begun. A dozen of "our own correspondents" had remained at the table to congratulate a director of the company and a proprietor of newspapers, upon the prospects of the great vessel in which they were seated. That director had just risen to acknowledge the compliment, when death stared him, and stared us all, in the face and spoke to us in a voice of thunder through a dull booming sound, a crash, another crash, and a fall of some heavy weight upon heavy wood. A number of shrieks upon deck, a distinct shock, a shower of broken glass which fell upon our table and about our heads, a smell of hot steam, and a sense of some awful danger, brought us all upon our feet. I instantly recollected all that had ever been said against the vessel, all the monsters I had seen amongst her machinery, all the mysterious noises I had heard at the back of every partition during the night, all the gulfs I had looked into upon deck, and still I could come to no con-

clusion. It was not my place, nor the place of any man at that table, amongst "our own correspondents," to fear death. We were there as running historians for running readers, and it was our duty to see and record as much as possible. Any other course of action would have been a fraud upon our employers—the public.

I have no particular kind of courage. I cannot endure a cut finger; but I have sufficient nervous excitement to carry me through Pandemonium, and out at the other side. It carried me through the steam, down a staircase, into the grand saloon, which had been blown to pieces by the explosion of the water-casing all down the main fore funnel. Not a vestige of the volcano in a glass case was to be seen. The iron funnel, weighing many tons, had been shot up from its root in the hold of the ship, through the roof above, to fall across the deck, with its inner casing crumpled up like dried parchment. The hangings were torn and disordered, the floor was covered with broken glass, the barley-sugar-stick rails in some places were displaced, the carpet was rolled up and smoking with damp heat, the mirrors were either shattered or dimmed with thick steam, and the lamps in some places were broken down or were wrenched awry. The gingerbread glory of the Italian Court at sea was gone. The couch upon which I had been sitting, two hours before, with my back to the bursting funnel-boiler,

was also gone, but the bookcase, nearly opposite, from which I had taken a book, still remained. The chess-boards I had specially ordered for the evening's amusement in this arabesque sepulchre were overturned. The floor was rent asunder in a hundred places, and in the ladies' saloon, along the centre of the apartment, it was thrown up into a bow, and torn into shreds like the strips which cover a case of oranges, or like you may cut a band-box with a large knife. The private staircase of this inner drawing-room was blown in all directions, together with its covered way or pavilion, which stood upon deck. Down below there was a broad, deep gulf like a sprung mine, filled with fragments of heavy timber and splinters of wood, all torn as small as if they had been prepared for special sale. They were lying in shelving heaps against the wall, and the whole place looked like a large building-yard after a volcanic eruption. Down another gulf in the Italian Court there was a bundle of ragged planks, sticking up, in many directions, and a pair of smaller funnels, which had come through the floor of the spot where the volcano in a glass-case had formerly stood, and which were crossed like the letter X, some distance up into the once gorgeous apartment. This part of the vessel was never meant for sea-going purposes, but only as a river show, and it came to a violent and untimely end.

As I was among the first in this shattered cell

of over-decoration, I saw the captain's little girl hurried out of a passage leading to a nest of berths on the left, and passed on up-stairs uninjured. She was the only person in the room at the time of the explosion. Looking over the rails near the left chief doorway, down a well that had been made by the blowing away of certain skylights, I heard several frantic cries of "They're buried!—They're dying!—They're smothered!" Immediately after this about a dozen excited men began to tear frantically at a huge jammed heap of splinters, blankets, mattresses, doorways, couches, iron, and glass. Above the din you could hear the regular moans of a person in distress, and this only served further to excite the men who were endeavouring to tear away the obstinate rubbish.

"He's here!—He moves!—Heave down a rope!—Pull up a chain!—Handy, there!—He's gone!—Hah!"—and a hundred such phrases were shouted by every man below, while many jumped upon the welded mass of fragments, without knowing what they were doing. The buried man was at length dragged out underneath the heap by the energetic and well-directed exertions of Mr. Hawkins, the chief boatswain, to whom he may consider himself indebted for his life. He presented a sickening spectacle of blood and bruises as he was carried with loud cheers up the saloon staircase, but his wounds were happily slight, although he would pro-

bably have been suffocated in a few more minutes. He was a near neighbour of mine as far as sleeping accommodation went, being placed next door but one. He had retired to his berth after dinner (as I might have retired to mine, but for the little compliment we were paying to the director), and while there the ruin came upon him like a cloud of dust. The only trace that I could find, some time after, of my berth—No. 444—was the fragment of a figure-plate upon the main wall.

Passing on to the deck again, I met a number of stokers carefully carrying a scalded comrade of theirs, who was one of thirteen injured by the explosion through the furnace down one of those fearful stoke-holes. One man had jumped through a port-hole in his agony—to be immediately drowned; and the poor fellow who was being carried along the deck was crying hysterically, most probably from fright. The whole crew, with a few exceptions, were very much unnerved. Another victim soon came along, who appeared to be doubled up, as if with cramp, but who endeavoured to walk, with a little help. I followed these men into what was called the dispensary, or hospital-hold, down a dark and double flight of steps, by the light of a flickering candle, round a corner, and between two long tables, across a lower unfinished common dining saloon; through another rough deal door, and down a dark winding staircase; across a kind of hold, up

a pair of ladder steps, and along two passages, until at last I opened the door amongst the wounded, dead, and dying. It was a low-roofed, dirty, wretched place, with a small surgery at the end, and as one man was putting down mattresses and preparing blanket-beds, another was sweeping up the shavings, dirt, and chips from the floor. It was not large enough, nor airy enough, to contain the dozen injured men, and some were placed upon tables in a hold of the vessel. A number of beds were pulled to pieces for the sake of the white soft wool they contained, and when the half-boiled bodies of the poor creatures were anointed with oil, they were covered over with this wool, and made to lie down. They were nearly all stokers and firemen, whose faces were black with their work, and one man who was brought in had patches of red raw flesh on his dark, agonized face, like dabs of red paint, and the skin of his arms was hanging from his hands like a pair of tattered mittens. He was marked early for peace and death, while the others, who have since gone to rest, were moaning, and complaining of thirst or cold, and were with difficulty kept down in their rude beds all through the bitter night. Poor fellows! they add a few more martyrs to the long list of men who have been sacrificed in the working of fancy inventions. As they lay with their begrimed faces above the coverlets, and their chests covered with the strange woolly

coat that had been put upon their wounds, they looked like wild beings of another country or another world, whose proper fate it was to labour and suffer differently from us.

All through the bitter night, as the huge vessel, whose shell was uninjured, still kept upon her course to "ensure the commercial success of the undertaking" (I use the exact directorial phrase), many groups of whispering riggers and stokers were standing in corners of holds and parts of the deck, while the passengers who had lost, or who had forsaken, their berths, either walked about until daybreak, or slept feverishly upon chairs and couches, or under the staircase pavilions on deck. Many servants of the public, like myself, were busily employed in examining the results of the explosion, in eliciting the true character of the accident bit by bit, and in collecting, with some difficulty and opposition, that painful information which was laid before the public by telegram the first moment we were allowed to go on shore. To help in ensuring the commercial success of the undertaking, we were kept the prisoners of the company from Hastings to Weymouth, and we were insulted by being asked and expected to place an official report in the columns of the newspaper press, which had the singular peculiarity of concealing every particle of the truth. Having passed, by some miracle, through what every competent and unprejudiced engineer-

ing authority on board declared to be the greatest explosion, considering the weights and forces, that had ever happened on board a steam-vessel, we were asked to call it "an accident," and to say that "several stokers were injured," when three were already dead, and five more out of the other ten were not expected to recover.

It is almost needless to say that such a report was indignantly rejected, and that I, for my part, claim to be considered no enemy to an interesting and great enterprise, no foe to progress, no antiquated croaker, or man behind my age, because I decline to accept a purely experimental vessel, on a disastrous experimental trip, round a portion of this island as a proved great ocean success, and because I have joined with a few others in speaking the whole unqualified truth.

THE LAST STAGE-COACH.

I ONCE had a strong liking for a piece of country extending from the metropolis to a small market-town about forty miles distant, not at that time taken out of the hands of our dear old coaching friends, that we all loved so well. I liked the town because it was rather faded; because it was in an undecided transition state; uncertain whether it should accept, in a friendly spirit, the insidious advances of the proposed branch from the remote main line of railway, or simultaneously close the shutters of every shop and house, and emigrate to Australia in a solid compact body of village deserters. I liked it, because it was a sulky coaching chrysalis, determined not to develop without a severe struggle into the railway butterfly. I loved to hear its innkeepers, its fly-proprietors, and its runners of coaches, converse in the dingy, smoke-dried tap of the principal hotel upon the probability of the railway ever reaching them; and the injurious effects which it would have upon trade if it ever came so far. I wished for nothing more interesting than a discourse from such men upon the des-

tiny of railway enterprise, its operation upon the country at large, and its final operation upon itself. I have seen a small job-master (the owner of two broughams and three gigs, which he let out almost at his own price to commercial travellers, and others whose business or pleasure compelled or induced them to post across the country) at times driven almost mad by the strengthening rumours of the advancing iron-road: at others, when inflated with an extra pipkin of the best local beer, drawing himself up to his full height, and expanding to more than his full breadth, and resolving to oppose, single-handed, the tide of the threatened improvement. Some gravely shook their heads, and expressed a doubt whether, with all his capital, he was equal to the task; others hoped to see the day when a station would be opened in the town, but they very much doubted it.

I will not conceal the object that took me so frequently to this place—it was fishing. I will not divulge the name of my retreat, even now, because, like all true sportsmen, I am essentially selfish. I am not yet too old and rheumatic to give up the pleasures of the rod and line, and I do not therefore hold myself bound to publish the name of a town that can boast of a trout stream worth all the subscription fisheries in the three kingdoms. In those days it was a six hours' journey (costing, with the perquisites of coachman and guard, between one

and two pounds), to reach my favourite and nameless retreat. Now I can run down in two hours at almost any period of the day for a few shillings, which is all the more reason for my secrecy. When I feel unwell in mind or body, I seize my old fishing companions, packing a few things hurriedly in a small black hand-bag, and take wing for my peaceful hermitage. It does not seem so secluded now, nor so pleasantly distant from the metropolis as it did in the old coaching days; and sometimes I fancy that I can see the London smoke rising and floating above the trees, and hear the roar of the humming London life, as I lie upon the sloping grass banks watching my float and line gliding down my favourite stream. In the evening I return to the hotel or inn, and, having nothing better to do, I always spend an hour in the tap or smoking-room, listening to the conversation of the wise men of the village. Many times a year—more than I care to name—for the last quarter of a century, have I idled away my leisure hours in this manner; with various fortune as to sport, which grieves me little, but with uniform fortune as to health and amusement, profitably mixed with food for reflection. When I first went to the place, the town was in the full pride, profit, and glory of the old coaching days. From fifteen to twenty highly-painted, well-horsed rolling-stages passed through from an early hour of the morning until a late hour of the night. Then

the principal hotel was a sight to see. Horses standing outside in the road, porters rushing to and fro with luggage, ostlers busy with bright and complicated harness; passengers, both male and female, alighting from the roof of the vehicles by the assistance of ladders and the obliging guard; buxom landlady and neat chambermaids standing ready to give a reception to the guests; a clean, whitewashed archway, floored with bright red bricks, and roofed with hanging hams, sirloins of beef, legs of mutton, and haunches of venison, while beyond were the extensive stables as prim as a Dutch farm-house, with an old carved wooden gallery running all round the yard.

Then the commercial traveller was a steady, deliberative, time-taking pioneer of trade, who rode his own horse, or drove his own vehicle, and not the bustling, high-pressure, watch-consulting, Bradshaw-turning, Manchester maniac who is left to us now. He was known as a bagman, and gloried in the appellation, without having the ambition to be regarded as a commercial gentleman. The coffee-room was then kept sacred for those persons of the superior classes who availed themselves of the luxuries and conveniences of stage-coach travelling, without going the length of indulging in private apartments. To obtain the coveted favour of a box-seat was an affair of many weeks' booking and many shillings' fee. He who got it by dint of patience,

forethought, and capital, was an object of envy to his fellow-voyagers the journey through. He was a comfortable man, because (in the winter-time) in addition to his own shawls and rugs, he had the extra protection of the coachman's leather apron. He was a happy man, because he was the confidential repository of the vast stores of information about horse-craft, poured into his ear by the ever-communicative driver; and more because he was occasionally entrusted with the ribbons or reins during certain rests, or the temporary vacation of the throne of government by the lawful monarch. Turnpike-keepers were ready, obedient, and respectful; ostlers at roadside houses, where the horses had their mouths cleaned out with a wisp of hay and a pail of water, were positively bent nearly double with admiration bordering upon veneration —hoping, but almost fearing, that they might one day be called upon to fill a position of such imposing state and heavy responsibility as that of the driver of a four-horse coach through a first-class line of country. When the loaded vehicle rolled away after a change of horses, with four prancing animals rather fresh just put to, any bystander might have heard some such conversation as this between the two men who led the relieved steeds, smoking and panting, up the yard:—

"Muster Simmons, he know a thing or two, eh, Bill?"

"As well as 'ere and 'ere a one, Jack."

"There ain't the meare on this road as can get over him, Bill, when he's a-minded?"

"Not exactly, Jack."

Sometimes, if the coachman happened to be a new, an illiberal, and consequently an unpopular hand, the remarks were not so full of unbounded admiration.

"Why he's no more use with four on 'em, Bill, than my little finger!"

"No more he ain't, Jack; I'll bring a boy as 'll lick him any day with 's own team on 's own ground!"

"Any boy!—any hinfant, Jack!"

This was something like the existing state of things when I first began to visit my nameless country town. I soon became an inmate of some little importance at the principal hotel where I took up my quarters, being promoted from the numerical insignificance which attaches to a single lodger, who is at the same time a private individual with no rank or title, in a huge provincial caravanserai where they make up fifty beds. I was at last known and addressed by my name, and even allowed, when I felt so disposed, to pass half an hour in agreeable conversation with the landlady's daughters in the little parlour behind the bar. I have no fault to find with those young ladies, on the contrary, I could record much in their praise;

but I am sorry to have to damage my reputation for gallantry by owning that I found more amusement in the tobacco-clouded atmosphere of the smoking room than I did in their society, delightful as it was. At this period the first rumours of railway enterprise began to dawn upon the world, and also, after a decent interval, upon my nameless country town. I am not about to raise the veil, and expose to ridicule such humble, lowly, and simple-hearted, though a little ignorant and obstinate fry, as a village barber, two village drapers, several important agriculturists, and the usual nightly visitors of a country hotel tap, by making a farcical record of their opinions upon the—at that time—incomprehensible wonder of the age. They spoke according to their lights, which were not very brilliant, and they had plenty of persons in authority, whose intellect ought to have been sharpened by early training and intercourse with the world—even quarterly reviewers and the like—to keep them in countenance, and supply them with arguments for their nightly gatherings. Everything that was solemnly launched in type in the metropolis against the new gigantic scheme, was punctually and carefully copied into the local newspaper of my nameless country town.

The central figure of most importance in the little arena of tobacco-smoke and discussion, was that of the principal coach-proprietor, Mr. Burleigh.

He owned many of the vehicles and horses, running to and fro from my nameless country town, and all the arrangements for the traffic on the London road. He was a tall, powerful, red-faced man, who spoke little or nothing, and drank a good deal of brandy. He was treated with much respect in the smoking-room, because of his capital and power of giving lifts at any time to his fellow-townsmen. To do him justice, I do not believe that any poor man, woman, or child, ever need have lost a chance of going free to London or any part of the country, if they had only asked Mr. Burleigh for leave in a proper manner. His benevolence was not of that active, overflowing nature, that it burst out like a pent-up spring without being solicited; but it was to be got at, like many another man's in a higher sphere than Mr. Burleigh, by appealing to his sense of importance. Mr. Burleigh had not created his present position—he had been born into it.

Whatever hidden stores of wisdom Mr. Burleigh possessed—and the frequenters of my hotel smoking-room gave him credit for possessing a vast fund—he carefully kept them to himself. The only words that I ever heard drop from him in the smoking-room, during the discussion of the great railway question, were his very favourite and somewhat oracular remarks of, "Well, it may be very good,

but I can't see it." Then he would add, after a little reflection, "No; I can't see it."

In this way a few months—a few years—rolled by me, and I still paid my periodical visits to my nameless country town. One of the young ladies behind the bar had got married (to spite me, I suppose, because I was not matrimonially inclined); railways had advanced in the land a huge stride; the company, with one or two important exceptions, still assembled in the smoking-room of my hotel, and Mr. Burleigh still held fast to his coaches, and could not see it.

Another period of a few years passed; another young lady behind the bar had got married; the barber of the town (my barber, whom I had indoctrinated with my views upon railways) had died, with opinions far in advance of his village and his age, leaving his business to an only son, with these memorable words, "Tummus! a great movement is coming—keep your heye on it!" Still Mr. Burleigh held fast to his coaches (although he might have sold the whole stock over and over again); drank, if anything, a little more brandy, and could not see it.

In another year not only was a main line constructed through a not very distant part of the country, but (as I said at the opening of this paper) a branch was positively mapped out by the ener-

getic directors to my nameless country-town. I saw with my own eyes (and dared not interfere) one of the early surveyors seized by indignant villagers connected with the coaching interest, and ducked in a horse-pond.

That night there was an unusually strong muster, and great excitement in the smoking-room; with a powerful disposition to rally round Mr. Burleigh as the representative of the coaching interest. No amount of sympathy, expressed or implied, could, however, obtain from him more than his oracular assertion, that he couldn't see it. What he really thought he would not say; but I believe that he rested his faith—as many of the interested townspeople present did—upon a local baronet to turn back the advancing tide of railway encroachment. My little friend, the job-master, with the two broughams and the three gigs, thought he was individually strong enough for the task without the assistance of any baronet or nobleman in the country; but he was rather pooh-poohed than otherwise by the general company, although he had a small circle of intense believers, who thought him fully equal to the undertaking.

The local baronet was one of the good old school: that is to say, he wore cord breeches and top-boots, swore every five minutes, got drunk with ale and brandy every night, patronized cock-fights when in London, and had given a belt with a purse

of ten guineas to be annually fought and pommeled for by the youth of my nameless country town. His nose had been smashed by a fall during a fox-hunt, and generally he had the appearance of a champion of the prize-ring. His title was Sir Boxer Bully, Baronet.

Sir Boxer was the largest land proprietor in the whole county. He owned splendid parks, splendid forests, extensive acres, and enormous farms. No branch-line from the main trunk could possibly reach my nameless country town, unless it passed for many miles through the property of the popular local barcnet; in fact, the shortest direct route would be along a natural valley in his family park, not far from his family mansion.

Now, the faith which the townspeople assembled in the smoking-room of my hotel had in the anti-railway sentiments of the popular local baronet was very great; and I suppose that the silent Mr. Burleigh shared in the general feeling. Everybody there knew that Sir Boxer's favourite recreation was to meet upon the road Mr. Burleigh's Highflyer, Quicksilver, or Lightning four-horse coach, and relieve the driver (at the imminent risk of the passengers' necks) by tooling the prads for ten or twelve miles, like a real born gentleman, that he was; that is, according to the standard that was recognized in those days.

No one who had seen him in his broad-brimmed

hat, his great coat, his buff leather gloves, and his narrow cord breeches, and top-boots, holding the tugging reins, and poising the canary-coloured, silver-headed, long-thonged whip, could hesitate about the nature and extent of his opposition to the proposed branch railway.

Another period of a few years passed by. Sir Boxer did oppose the railway, and prevented the extension of the branch to my nameless country town. Most of the inhabitants believed that this was done on principle; but a few of the sceptical and uncharitable—myself amongst the number—thought that it was because the worthy Baronet had not been offered his price. The railway pioneers had been liberal without doubt—as was the fashion in those early days of energy and enterprise—but an old aristocratic family park was not to be cut up for the benefit of rapid communication, like a common, plebeian farm. Therefore, Sir Boxer, for the present, remained doggedly passive.

In the meantime the directors had carried the railway to a point about five miles distant from my nameless country town; they then remained doggedly passive also.

The effect that this extension had upon coaching interests (although Mr. Burleigh couldn't see it) was very injurious. The station was reached by the main road after two hours' walk, or one hour's drive, and it then took about two hours more, with

a fare of four shillings, to reach London. For a little time the inhabitants of my nameless country town looked shyly upon this new and cheap mode of conveyance; believed all the exaggerated stories of dangers to be feared, and accidents that had already occurred—circulated, I am sorry to have to believe, in the interest of the solemn Mr. Burleigh; and rallied round that injured and suffering coach-proprietor; who, although he couldn't see it, had been wise enough to reduce his fares to meet the new competition. Gradually, however, one or two adventurous spirits had been induced to try the experiment of the road and railway journey to the metropolis; and, having returned, uninjured, with a favourable report of the sensations they had experienced, others followed their example, and the railway rose steadily in popularity in proportion as its novelty and the fear of its dangers wore off.

It was at this time that Mr. Burleigh was subjected to his severest trial. About the general public of the nameless country town, small as it was, he did not care much; although every individual knew him, and professed a regard for him; but his own family began to turn against him. It was not exactly his own flesh and blood; that would, indeed, have been bitter; but, one morning, the sad intelligence was conveyed to him that his second nephew on the wife's side had started off, without the knowledge of his parents, to make his

first journey on the railroad. The mother came round, with tears in her eyes, to apologize, explain, and condole with Mrs. Burleigh; and Mrs. Burleigh, in her turn, conveyed the apologies, explanations, and condolences to her husband. He did not say much—he never did; but he felt the affliction deeply. Still he resolved to fight the distant railroad, or die in harness in the attempt. His passengers dropped off, day by day, his luggage carrying had entirely gone, his daily consumption of brandy increased, and he was again induced, by the advice of friends and persons of experience, to reduce his fares. I think, at this time, he began to see it.

I continued my trips, as usual; and, fair weather or fine weather, clung to the Burleigh Quicksilver, and Highflyer (the Lightning had already gone to pay expenses) as if I had been the fine old English gentleman who lived in the olden time. There were many melancholy changes for the worse. The horses were not so rampant; the turnpike keepers were not so watchful nor so obedient; the ostlers were not so numerous, and those who were left were not so admiring and so respectful; the guard had gone, and the coachman put on the drag himself, when we went down hill, by the mechanical contrivance of a rope that dangled by the side of the box-seat. Sometimes we drove several stages unicorn fashion—three horses instead of four. Gradually, one or two, then three or four of the hotels

on the line of road closed their shutters, stuck up bills all over their frontage, announcing a sale, or, when in a favourable position, let off the greater portion of their now unrequired premises for other business purposes. Some regularly broke down under the affliction, and, not finding a purchaser or a tenant, became dreary roadside spectacles of broken windows and rain-washed placards. Under this sad state of things, we had to alter our arrangements for changing horses. Our stages were made longer; and sometimes the cattle were brought to us along a bleak, muddy lane, from a few wretched barns, led by stooping old men in dirty, fluttering, clay-coloured smock-frocks, who had much more of the potato-field about them than the stable-yard.

At these painful moments the old coachman, who had seen better days, if he was not moved to swear at the clumsy fingers of the inexperienced agricultural groom, relapsed into a moody silence, only broken by a sigh that was heart-rending in its depth and intensity. As we passed through long, straggling villages, there was none of that excitement at our approach which had marked our triumphal progress years before. No crowds were waiting to receive us as we rolled down the hill or up the hill, as the case might be; past the finger-post; past the duck-pond, scattering the affrighted poultry right and left; along the cottage-bordered street, round by the little tree-sheltered, square-

towered church, and away again into the open country. A few barefooted, dusty children watched us slyly; some with their fingers in their mouths; some with their ragged pinafores thrown over their heads; some with their faces half averted, turned towards the wall. Our approach to my nameless country town was not, by a great way, the splendid entry that it used to be. There was no horn to blow, and no guard to blow it. At the hotel, too, things had vastly changed. It was still neat and clean, as it always would be in the possession of the buxom landlady, now growing a little old, a little gray, and very care-worn; but it wanted customers, it wanted bustle, and it wanted life. In the smoking-room the same company still assembled, with one or two exceptions caused by death, bankruptcy, or emigration; and the same engrossing topic—railway prospects and designs—was discussed with the same earnestness; but with a little less obstinacy, and a little more knowledge and experience, than a few years before. Mr. Burleigh still endeavoured to keep up his important position amongst his fellow-townsmen, but evidently with less ease and more opposition than formerly. I was constituted a kind of umpire or referee for the little group; and many men who had doubted most energetically whether they should ever see a railroad within a hundred miles of my nameless country town, now appealed to me in the most

barefaced manner to know if they had ever had the slightest misgivings about the ultimate establishment and development of railway enterprise. "Mr. Burleigh," they said, confidentially, "had not seen it—in fact, could not see it now; but they had seen it all along, although they did not like to make much noise about it for fear of alarming their neighbours."

It was about this period that Sir Boxer Bully, Baronet, suddenly died. It was well for his credit with his tenants and townspeople that he did die, for he was just upon the point of acceding to the renewed offers of the railway directors, and allowing them to bring the railway through his property up to the town. Mr. Burleigh would never believe this, but it was the fact, nevertheless. Not that the deceased baronet was suddenly afflicted with any compunctious visitings for the injury that his six years' silent, sulky opposition had done to my nameless country town, but that the living board of directors had just then thought proper to make an increased offer to the lately deceased baronet. All eyes—especially those connected with the fast-fading, dry-rotting coaching interest—were turned with anxiety to young Bully, who succeeded by his father's death to the entire property and the baronetcy. He was a tall, thin, mild, clerical-looking gentleman, as unlike his late lamented father as it was possible to be. He had

spent much of his time in schools and universities, and had the most singular notions about literary institutions, dispensaries, public baths, and other novelties. The belt and purse of guineas for the best pugilist in the county were very quickly done away with, as well as a number of other similar footprints left by the late lamented fine old English baronet. The son's movements were so rapid, and his opinions were so peculiar, that the debate in the smoking-room assumed for several nights the form of whether the young baronet was sane or insane, and his sanity was, at last, only carried, after a severe struggle, by a small majority of two. Mr. Burleigh, although, as usual, he did not say anything, was evidently in the minority upon the question. He had his doubts about the young man, and they were well founded; better founded than his faith in the unswerving protection-to-old-established-native-industry-spirit of the deceased baronet. Before the remains of the late lamented Sir Boxer Bully, Baronet, were decently covered, the pickaxes of the railway navigators were rooting up the turf of his sacred acres. Still Mr. Burleigh was not quite capable of seeing it.

Another period passed by, much as the periods had passed before, and we arrived at last within a day of the opening of the railway direct from my nameless country town to the metropolis. A business appointment in London which I could not

neglect prevented my being present at this ceremony, although I had been in the neighbourhood for a fortnight previously. At four o'clock in the afternoon of the day before the opening, I took my seat upon the box-seat of the Quicksilver coach (the Highflyer had gone the way of the Lightning) to honour with my patronage the last journey to town it was intended to make. Mr. Burleigh mounted by my side to take the reins—for he had been reduced to act as his own coachman for some months past—and he shook me by the hand in a manner that he, no doubt, intended to be warm, out of gratitude for my thoughtful kindness in supporting him on this trying and melancholy occasion.

It was no ordinary journey. It was a funeral of a four-horse coach, performed by its ruined but obstinate proprietor. As we wound slowly out of my nameless country town, many persons stood looking at us with various expressions of triumph, pity, and contempt; but I was the only individual besides the proprietor-driver in and about the coach, the last single passenger who had booked through for the last journey. It was a cold, dull, bleak day near the end of August. Masses of heavy cloud were flying above, which constantly foreboded rain, but did not bring it. Mr. Burleigh was well stimulated with raw brandy at starting, and he did not fail to refresh himself with this

liquid at every opportunity. The harness was getting old and out of order, and Mr. Burleigh had frequently to descend from his seat to repair it, which caused considerable delay. As he drove mechanically along, he preserved a moody silence which I did not attempt to break, presuming that he was occupied with reflections that might eventually lead him to see it. At several of the lanes and barns where we changed horses, the men kept us waiting for full twenty minutes; but, as Mr. Burleigh made no complaint, I held my peace, as it would have been refined cruelty to add quarrels to the horrors of this sombre journey. When we had got about half-way through, we picked up another passenger—a fat, sickly, pudding-faced boy, who was waiting at a turnpike with a shaggy, howling dog, half-a-dozen boxes, and two pounds of cake in his hand, with eight or nine people to see him off. There was a visible look of disappointment in Mr. Burleigh's face when he found what an unusual number of spectators there were in this hopeful roadside crowd to one juvenile passenger. The boy was placed inside with the cake, and the door locked; the packages were soon disposed of, and the dog was put in the boot to howl and moan incessantly, and enliven our last journey.

Our time to arrive in London was properly half-past nine at night, but harness-breaking and

brandy-drinking made it nearly one o'clock in the morning before we reached the Old Dragon Inn, at Smithfield.

Eight persons, chiefly females, were anxiously waiting for the pudding-faced boy with the dog and packages, and they made some cruel remarks to Mr. Burleigh about the uncertainty of coach-travelling compared with the railway. He did not reply, but stared vacantly at them as they disappeared with the boy up the street. The rotten gates of the Old Dragon Inn were slowly and painfully opened with a fearful creaking by an old, palsy-stricken ostler, with a voice that squeaked from the lowest depths of his slender stomach. He made some faint remark—no one could possibly tell what—as he led the horses and vehicle down the stone hill into the yard. It was a fitting grave to receive the last stage-coach, and the old ostler was its most fitting sexton.

The Old Dragon Inn was in a sadly changed condition since I had seen it last. My usual custom was to drop down from Mr. Burleigh's vehicles outside the town, seldom coming as far as the end of the journey to dismount. Three or four years must have gone by since I had accepted the hospitality of the Old Dragon Inn; but, being unusually late, and determined to see the broken-down Quicksilver to its tomb, and its broken-down owner to his bed, I resolved to pass the remainder of the night in it.

Mr. Burleigh took little notice of me, but made for a corner of the yard where a dull red light, caused by a candle shining through a curtain, denoted the position of the bar. I lingered a few minutes to look round and examine the changes that had taken place.

The principal entrance—a long passage lined on each side with what were formerly stables—was now turned into a narrow street of small, dirty, cattle-smelling houses, let out in tenements, and decorated with festoons of ragged, yellow clothes that danced upon clothes-lines, stretched across the thoroughfare from end to end. The old gate that opened into the main road was now closed, and the inhabitants slept soundly, and did not dream of being robbed of their humble garments.

Several pools of liquorice-coloured water were in the yard, presided over by rotten wooden pumps. The stones were saffron-coloured, broken, and uneven. The out-houses were falling to pieces, and the sky shone in numberless places through the broken roofs. Under one of these places of doubtful shelter was stowed a large pile of cheeses; under others, heavy carts that looked like grain-waggons; and also a few yellow-boarded vans with pictures of fat women, boa-constrictors, and learned pigs. The Old Dragon Inn could no longer afford to be exclusive; but was compelled to open its doors to entertain any man and beast that thought

proper to knock at them. Sometimes it afforded shelter to the drovers of the cattle-market; sometimes, as in the present instance, it welcomed the motley mummers who were preparing for the approaching Bartholomew Fair. Drums, boarding, poles, carts, and waggons were lying about the yard. The night was clearer than the day, and I had, therefore, no difficulty in observing these things.

I joined Mr. Burleigh, who was still drinking raw brandy in the bar, and learned that every stable and bed-room in the inn, except one—a double bedded apartment—was taken up by jugglers, horse-riders, tumblers, and fair-people. The bar was dirty and ill-stocked; the floor was half covered with mud and straw; there was a smell of rum, beer, and tobacco-smoke floating through the place; and the woman who attended upon us was sad, pale, and dowdy. While we were speaking, the old palsied, stomach-voiced ostler came in with a broken lantern, containing an expiring candle-end.

"I've guv the two mears a quartern-a-'arf an' three pennorth; but the old 'oss seems hoff 'is feed, sir."

This was asthmatically said to Mr. Burleigh, who replied at wonderful length for him:

"No wonder, Sam, no wonder. I'm off my feed myself."

The woman behind the bar shook her head

mournfully; the palsied ostler shook his head more than usual (for it was always shaking); and Mr. Burleigh, having drained another glass of raw brandy, motioned the ostler to lead on with the cracked lantern, and departed from the bar without uttering another word. I looked at the dowdy woman for a moment, and learning from her glance that I was to follow Mr. Burleigh, and share the double-bedded room, I did so without remonstrance, joining the broken-down coach-proprietor and the palsied ostler.

We went under a low archway; past several dunghills; over several of the liquorice-coloured puddles; past some grunting pigs in a sty, over many uneven saffron-coloured stones, between a ruined mail-coach that rested upon three wheels, and a waggon, that, to judge by the sound of heavy breathing coming from it, was well peopled with sound sleepers; up some old rotten steps, on to an equally rotten gallery (the old ostler motioning us to be careful of one or two doubtful planks), under an open doorway into a large square low-roofed room, that had the general saffron-coloured appearance of the place, and the same faint smell of tobacco and the stables. It contained two beds, like tents, the covering of which was of the tint of parchment. One stood to the right near the door; the other at the further end of the room. Two bits of ragged carpet and two rush-bottomed chairs, near

the beds, one high narrow washing-stand against the wall, and a black, knotted looking-glass over the fire-place completed the furniture. There was only one window, which opened upon the gallery outside the door.

I went to the bed at the further end of the room, and threw myself upon it in my clothes, amusing myself by watching Mr. Burleigh.

"Sam," he said to the ostler, as he was closing the door, "bring up a crust of bread and cheese, and a pint of brandy."

In a few minutes Sam returned with the required refreshment. Upon a plate, beside the small loaf and cheese, was a short table-knife with a thick blade that had been worn and cleaned down to a point, until it was like a dagger. The old ostler closed the door, and left us to our repose.

How long I remained lying there, watching Mr. Burleigh, and at what precise moment I drew the dingy, parchment-shaded curtains of my tent-bed together, I cannot tell. I had certainly fallen into a heavy sleep, when I was aroused by the sound of a loud deep voice. I peeped through the closed curtain. The day, as far as I could judge, was just beginning to break, for there was a pale light in the room by which I saw the tall figure of Mr. Burleigh standing up in his shirt-sleeves with his back towards me, and the short dagger-like cheese-knife held aloft firmly in his right hand. He was shout-

ing loudly to the blank wall near the door when I first looked at him, but he immediately turned round towards me, and I involuntarily shrank behind the curtain, peeping through the smallest crevice I could possibly command. He then commenced a fierce plunging walk in a circle round the centre of the room; his eyes nearly starting from his head; his left arm contracted and drawn back with the hand tightly clenched; and his right hand making short, rapid, and deadly stabs with the knife at some visionary enemy whom he was chasing. The pent-up silence of twenty years had at length broken out in a violent fit of delirium tremens. Mr. Burleigh could see it now with a vengeance. His thick voice coming from his foaming mouth, told that at every blow of the knife in the air, he cut to pieces a whole board of railway directors.

I kept my eye upon him through the closed curtain, as for one hour, or more (which to me seemed fifty years), he went unceasingly in his circle round the room. Silently and carefully I had moved the mattress of the bed, and had it ready for a shield in the event of his turning against me, which I momentarily expected. I heartily wished at that instant that I had never seen my nameless country town, its trout, its inns, its coaches, or its coach-proprietors. I thought of the most absurd and trifling incidents of my past life; how I had once stolen a teetotum from a boy at school; how I had

been unnecessarily cruel to the fish I had caught (although acting strictly within sporting rules); how I should have done much better by marrying and settling down with the youngest daughter of the landlady at the hotel of my nameless country town, instead of neglecting her, and her manifest partiality towards me, and going into the smoking-room to indulge in the savage luxury of gloating over the unhappy man before me. I then asked myself the most absurd conundrums, and replied to them by giving the most absurd answers. All this time the maniac broken-down coach-owner was circling round and round in his frenzy, and making a noise that I trusted every moment would arouse some of the sleepers in the waggon in the yard, if it did not reach the distant household. As I watched I saw the door fall back upon its hinges, and I thought my deliverance was at hand. I was doomed to disappointment. The door had been closed, but not fastened, and the vibration of the old floor, which went up and down under the heavy tread of the powerful and excited maniac, like the deck of a ship at sea, had caused it to open—nothing more. As I still watched the unfortunate coach-owner, I saw him stumble and fall backward. A plank had suddenly given way, and his right leg had gone through into the lath and plaster underneath. I was up in an instant, with one of the rush-bottomed chairs in my hand. It was a matter of

life and death, for he was double my size and strength, and he had already recovered himself, and was made furious by seeing me. I jobbed the chair desperately against him, sending him staggering towards the fire-place, and then my nerve gave way, and I dropped my weapon, bounding out of the door and over the railing into the yard, without regard, in my excitement, as to where I might fall. I came upon a large hog slumbering in a pigsty, but before he could get up and revenge himself upon the intruder, I was running down the yard, and under the low archway, shouting loudly for help, for I heard and saw Mr. Burleigh running after me along the gallery. I got to the showman's drums under the shed, one of which I struck heavily with my clenched fists, and the whole yard was soon in activity and motion. It was now broad daylight; drovers came out of stables, sun-burnt showmen and freckled women came out of vans, and out of the dwelling-house; several inhabitants of the small street where the clothes were hanging up, came out partially dressed to swell the crowd; a very fat lady (who I afterwards learnt was the Swiss giantess) appeared at the door of a show van under an out-house, exhibiting herself regardless of profit; tumblers in dirty pink tights, and clowns in spotted dresses, half concealed beneath long ragged great-coats (nearly everybody seemed to sleep full-dressed), bounded in amongst the throng; and the

dowdy bar-woman, who turned out to be the landlady and widow of the late landlord, brought up the rear, attended by the palsied ostler.

I was surprised to find that the maniac coach-owner, with the dagger cheese-knife, did not appear from under the archway, and I supposed that he was either waiting stealthily for a spring, or had destroyed himself with his own weapon. I told my story to the assembled and wondering group, and we proceeded cautiously in a body towards the quarter of the building where the double-bedded apartment was situated. We soon found the cause of Mr. Burleigh's delay in making his appearance. He had again fallen through the rotten floor—this time the planks of the old gallery—and so fast had one of his legs been caught by the splinters which had wedged him up to the thigh, that all his efforts to extricate himself were useless. He appeared a little more calm—probably from exhaustion—and having been got out, by the exertions of one of the show-carpenters, without any broken bones, he was guarded to bed, more peaceably than I had ever expected. The doctor's report, the next morning, after a good bleeding operation, was far from unfavourable.

I left a few hours afterwards, much shaken and fatigued, to keep my business appointment, and I did not see or hear anything of Mr. Burleigh for some years.

I still go down to fish in the outskirts of my nameless country town. It is, of course, much altered, and, in a commercial sense, it may be for the better. I get down at a small, clean, Gothic railway-station, and give up my ticket to a porter at the door, in whom I recognize an old coaching hanger-on, who has gone over to the enemy. I take my place in the short, thick railway-omnibus, which is licensed to carry six, but built to carry four, and jolt up to my old hotel.

One day, when I arrived as usual, I noticed a peculiar expression in the face of this porter, which foreboded something. As he took the ticket, and touched his cap, he said to me, confidentially—

"He's come back, sir!"

"Who, Dick?" I asked.

"Muster Burleigh."

As he said this, he pointed to the driving-box of the railway-omnibus, and, glancing up, I saw Mr. Burleigh sitting there, looking much older, with the reins in his hand.

"He can see it now, sir," said the porter, quietly.

"Yes, Dick," I replied; "he can see it now, Dick, and so can we all."

THE END.

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